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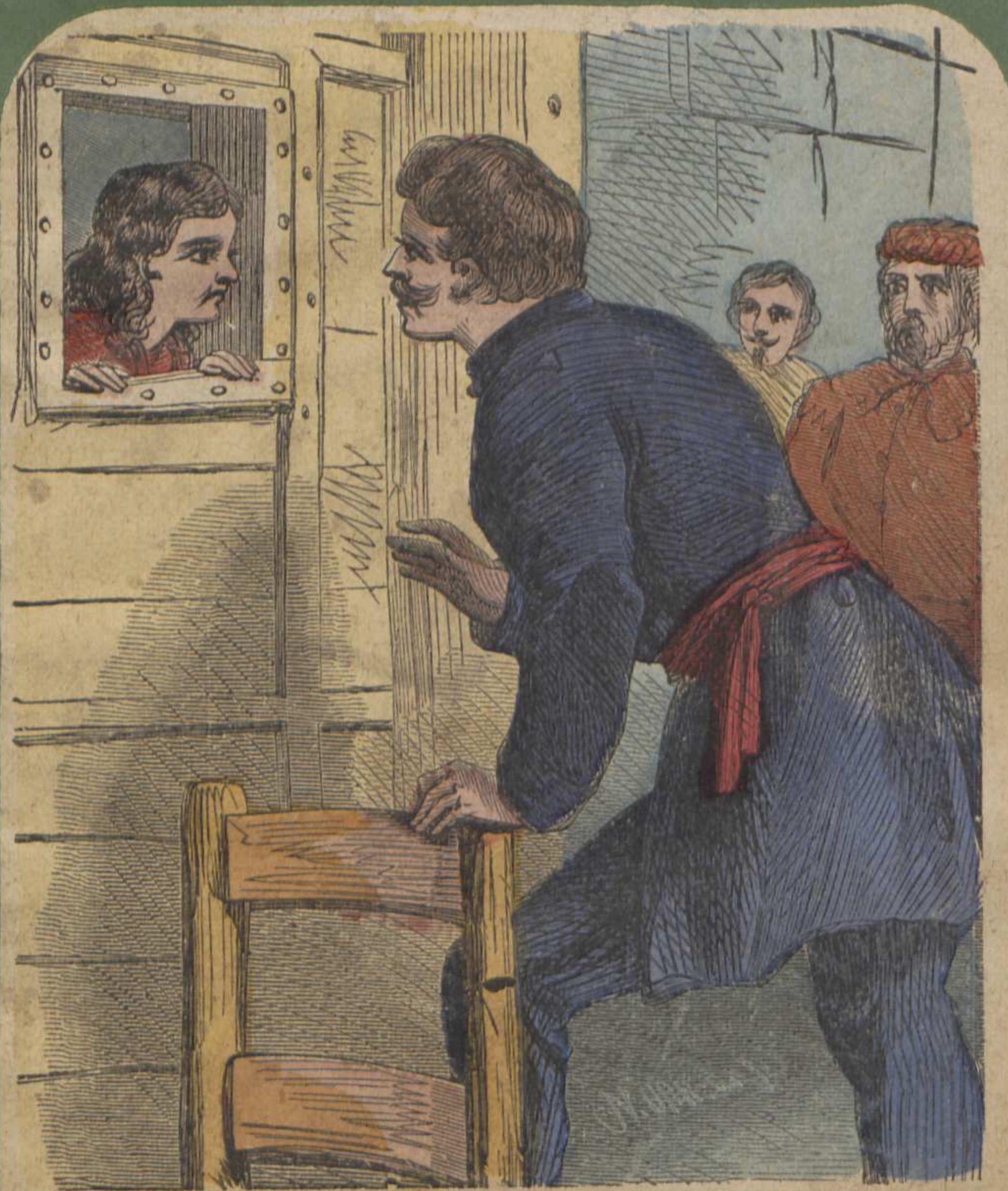
BEADLE'S

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POCKET NOVELS



The Three Captives. ¹⁶⁷



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B E A

THE
THREE CAPTIVES.

A TALE OF THE TAOS VALLEY.

BY EDWARD WILLETT,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING POCKET NOVELS:

111 THE TEXAS TIGER.

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139 THE SCIOTO SCOUTS.

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THE THREE CAPTIVES.

CHAPTER I.

THE ART OF WAR ACCORDING TO "REGULATION."

"I THINK we will soon catch up to them, sir."

"The red rascals! I hope we may, but they run from us as quick as we come in sight, and will never offer us anything like a fair fight. We would soon make mince-meat of them, if we could get them to stand, and if they were not such arrant cowards and sneaking assassins."

"I wish you would permit me to say what I think on that subject, major."

"I have no objection, provided that you will say nothing very silly, for it will serve to beguile this weary journey to listen to your crude ideas. You are very young, Lieutenant Bent, and you know little of the life of a soldier or of the art of war; but my officers are my military family, and I like to encourage them. Let me hear what you have to say, young gentleman."

"I am ready to admit, sir, that the Indians—whether Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Comanches, or whatever we have met—are sneaking assassins, but I am not so well convinced that they are cowards. That which seems to us like cowardice in them, is only their manner of fighting, and I am afraid that we shall never succeed in conquering them, until we learn to make war upon them in their own style."

"What! Do you know, young gentleman, that you are insulting the army of the United States, and its educated, trained, and veteran officers? I tell you, sir, there are no better soldiers in the world, than those which compose our regular army, and I may add that the discipline of the battalion which I have the honor to command is very near perfection. Are such men to be taught their business by a pack of howling and scampering savages, who maintain no order

in their ranks, and who scarcely acknowledge any leadership? Shall I, who am nearly sixty years old, who have been a soldier all my life, and who have served under our best commanders, submit to be taught the art of war by some naked rascal of a Comanche chief? Perhaps, young gentleman, you would advise me to turn over the command of this battalion to you?"

"I am not so presumptuous, and I am sure that I meant no disparagement of either the rank or file of our gallant army. But we should remember that we are fighting savages to whom our discipline and tactics and mode of warfare only afford opportunities for destroying us. These Indians are mostly mounted, and they are the best horsemen in the world."

"I have fifty dragoons, who could ride down ten times their number of the red rascals, in a fair charge and in an open field."

"But the Indians will give them no opportunity for a fair charge, and will never fight in an open field. Besides, our horsemen are dragoons, who are not accustomed to the desultory and irregular warfare that needs must be carried on in this country. Their close movements, their heavy horses, their carbines, and their sabers and revolvers, however effective they may be in a combat with civilized troops, are really of but little avail against a savage and concealed foe who fights from behind trees and rocks, and who picks them off with deadly aim, while he keeps his own person secured from danger. Our cavalry, as they are now constituted, must always act at a disadvantage in encountering an adversary who was born on horseback, as I may say, who carries no weight, and who is off like the wind as soon as he perceives that he may receive more damage than he can inflict."

"What do you call that, if not cowardice?"

"I call it their manner of making war. War is not carried on, as I conceive, for the purpose of showing the bravery of the soldiers, but for the purpose of defeating the enemy. The system which will prevail against antagonists like ourselves, and in a country of roads and cleared fields, will not be effective when it is adopted in a mountainous wilderness, against artful, insidious and skulking foes. The savages know

that they are inferior to the white men, in numbers, arms and discipline; therefore they must make use of all the advantages that they can gain over us. It is not because they are cowards, that they will not meet us in fair fight, but because they are aware that they have no men to spare, because they know that they would be defeated in the open field, and because they can gain more by taking us at a disadvantage and fighting us in their own way."

"According to your showing, an Indian war can be likened to nothing but a campaign against wild animals. For my part, I know that I could easily brush away every swarm of these red insects, if I could but reach them, but we might as well attempt to exterminate the fleas in Mexico, as to conquer such a scampering set. They are every where and nowhere, and there is no vital point in which we can strike them."

"Very true, sir. They have no towns or magazines, and no base or center of operations. They have no baggage-wagons, no commissariat, no incumbrances of any kind. They move like the wind, and can never be overtaken by either our infantry or our cavalry. They hover about us, unseen and unheard; they strike whenever they can do so to advantage, and vanish as soon as the blow has taken effect, or when fortune turns against them. The old system is entirely impotent against such an enemy."

"I suppose, Lieutenant Bent, that you consider yourself a representative of the rising generation, and of the new system. What mode of warfare do you advise, Sir Oracle, now that the world has grown so wise that veteran commanders must learn from raw youths?"

"Pardon me, Major Buttress, if I say that your sarcasm is entirely uncalled for. I make no pretensions to superior wisdom, but you gave me permission to ventilate some of my crude ideas, and I have done so freely. If I have given offense, I will say no more."

"I am not ready to take offense where none is intended. Proceed, for I wish to have the full benefit of your advice."

"It seems to me, sir, that infantry are almost useless in this kind of warfare, except to garrison forts and towns. We ought, I think, to organize and train a force of mounted men, irregulars, like the hunters and trappers of the plains and

mountains, who could cope with the savages in their own way, and on their own ground. Our soldiers should learn to be hunters and woodsmen, as well as disciplined troops, and then our magazines of supplies might be confined to the towns and fortified places, for the forces would move without encumbrance, like the Indians, and would subsist on the country through which they traveled. Such a force could advance or retreat as rapidly as the savages themselves, could fight them behind their own rocks and trees, could beat them at their own game of stealth and stratagem, and could overcome them by properly developing the superior weapons, as well as the superior courage and physical powers of the white race."

" You have made a long speech, my sapient young instructor, and you have spoken it so enthusiastically, that you have hardly taken time to draw breath. I presume that you would have your ragamuffin rangers take the place of the army of the United States, and have the leading rovers commissioned over our veteran officers."

" By no means, Major Buttress. You do me wrong to suppose that I could entertain such an idea. I would have them act as pioneers and scouts, to clear the way and feel the ground for disciplined troops, as the early settlers of the West have formed the advance-guard of better farmers, and a more advanced civilization. My ragamuffin rangers, as you call them, would always render invaluable assistance to the regular army, and their usefulness has often been proved. General Braddock was a brave man, and he led a splendid army into the wilderness, but we all know how he was defeated, and how the remnant of his command was saved by the ragamuffin rangers of Virginia, led by George Washington. When St. Clair undertook his campaign against the Indians in Ohio—"

" Lieutenant Bent, you are going too far!" exclaimed Major Buttress, with a burst of indignation. " I said to you, a short time ago, that you were presumptuous, but not impertinent. I now consider that you are impertinent and actually insulting. Do you pretend to insinuate that I am a hot-headed and obstinate Briton, like Braddock, or a superannuated dunderhead, like St. Clair? Do you suppose that I will suffer my command to be drawn into an ambush, and to be massacred where

they are unable to resist? If I did not know that your remarks were dictated only by your own presumptuous folly, I should regard them as a personal insult."

"I had no thought, sir, of referring to you, or of saying any thing that could possibly be considered offensive, for I respect you as my commander, and there is no one whom I esteem more highly as an officer and a gentleman, than yourself. I was merely proceeding to illustrate the position that I had taken, with regard to the employment of irregular troops in an irregular warfare."

"Enough, sir; I wish to hear no more of your new-fangled ideas, and boyish arguments. A pretty pass we have come to, when a young lieutenant, who has never seen a battle, presumes to instruct a veteran of nearly forty years' service, and to reflect upon his ability to command. It was my own fault, however, and I have no one to blame but myself, for I ought not to have encouraged you to step beyond your position and the line of your duty to make a display of your ignorance and presumption. I wish you to understand, Lieutenant Bent, that the flanks and rear of my command are well guarded, and that I also have a strong force of scouts in the advance; not, however, for the purpose of defense against the Indian rabble, but to feel the way, and to find the sneaking scoundrels if possible. There is no ground, therefore, for your puerile fears that I may be drawn into an ambush. I wish you further to understand that I consider that your conduct, since you joined this expeditionary force, has been prejudicial to good order and the discipline which should prevail in the army. You have encouraged the men in hunting and other irregular habits, and have permitted them to stray from their camps and commands for the purpose of engaging in such pursuits. You have thus caused a laxity of discipline which can no longer be tolerated."

"Do you not believe, sir, that skill in hunting, and a knowledge of woodcraft are valuable to the border soldier? Aside from the provision which he procures, and the practice which enables him to subsist without a commissariat, the hunter learns to charge his weapon coolly and to fire with precision, track his enemy, and to know the wiles and maneuvers of the Indians."

"I wish to hear no more of your arguments, sir ; you had better start a school for the purpose of teaching ducks to swim. I desire and command that you shall not attempt to educate the men of this force in any pursuits or habits that are not authorized and ordained by our army regulations and books of tactics. You have already done enough harm in that respect. I have also observed that you have lately neglected to wear your uniform ; in fact, that you are gradually adopting or returning to the dress of the backwoodsmen and ragged rangers whom you have been praising so highly."

"I thought, sir, that when I was not exactly on duty, and when we had entered the heart of the wilderness, I might be permitted to wear a dress that was more convenient and more suitable to the country in which we are operating."

"The army regulations give no such permission. Your conduct in that respect is subversive of good order and discipline, and it must be reformed. I have also noticed that you have got into the habit of carrying a rifle and a sheath-knife, together with a powder-horn and a bullet-pouch. No such weapons and implements are prescribed by the authorities, and consequently they are not allowed."

"Nevertheless, sir, they are very useful, both for fighting and for foraging, and I wish that all our officers were armed in the same fashion, for I suppose that we will have little use for our regulation swords in conflicts with the Indians."

"I wish to hear no more of your half-fledged thoughts and absurd suppositions. I am angry whenever I remember the very valuable information and excellent advice that you gave me concerning this route, and when I see my train blocked up and my horses stumbling over these infernal rocks and into these abominable gullies."

"It is the best, if not the only route to the Salt Lake. We can not expect to find roads in this section."

"But you called it a road, and that rascally vagabond of a trapper, whom you picked up at Taos, said that it was a first-rate road."

"It is no turnpike, but it is a good route for emigrants, and is well supplied with grass and wood and water, and

all the requisites for encamping. I wish you had consented to employ Bill Ward as a guide and scout, for he is a good hunter and woodsman, and he knows every mile of this country."

"Confound you, sir, do you call this a road?" angrily exclaimed the major, jerking up his horse, which had stumbled and fallen over a large boulder. "It is enough to make a saint swear to be forced to travel in this wretched country. There as I live, the foremost wagon is stalled, and the whole train has stopped. As you go, send Captain Sardis to me."

The young officer bowed, with a military salute, turned his horse and rode to the rear, while Major Buttress continued to grumble, and to abuse all mountains, mountaineers, and rascally red-skins.

CHAPTER II.

WAR WITHOUT ART.

THE time when the above detailed discussion concerning the art of Indian warfare took place, was near the middle of autumn, some twenty years ago.

Major Benjamin Buttress, a Virginian and a veteran officer, who had served in all the wars of his country since his boyhood, had been ordered from Missouri to Fort Smith, thence to New Mexico, and thence to the vicinity of the Great Salt Lake, where he was to establish a military post for the protection of traders and emigrants. His command consisted of nearly one hundred infantry and about fifty dragoons, beside a number of teamsters and others. He was accompanied by a large train of wagons and pack-horses, conveying supplies of all kinds for the expedition and for the post that was to be established. The party had thus far proceeded with safety and without difficulty, having passed through Santa Fe and up the valley of Taos, and were approaching the Sierra Madre, one of the most southern ranges of the Rocky Mountains.

Major Buttress, as has been said, was a veteran of nearly

forty years' service. He had distinguished himself on many fields, and had received several brevets, but his real promotion had been by the slow process of succession, and he had only attained the rank of major when he was verging on his sixtieth year. The old officer never complained that his merit was so tardily rewarded, for his gradual promotion was "according to regulations," and that was sufficient to quiet all murmurs and feelings of discontent. The major was a hale and hearty man, though his hair was gray and his face was furrowed by years and cares, and he looked, as he was, every inch a soldier. He was somewhat portly, but tall and erect, and the fatigue-uniform which he usually wore on a march set off his fine person to good advantage.

Major Buttress had married, at the mature age at which he had gained his captaincy, the fair but poor daughter of a Virginian of good family, to whom he had been engaged for many years. She accompanied him in most of his campaigns, and was his constant companion during his garrison life, until she was taken from him by death, leaving him with one child, a beautiful daughter, who was in her nineteenth year at the time when our tale opens. Fanny Buttress, after the death of her mother, occupied the place of that estimable lady as well as she could, following her father wherever he went, nursing him when he was sick and comforting him when he was in trouble, sharing his joys and sorrows, and monopolizing all the love of his strong and rough nature. Her beauty and vivacity had gained her many admirers, especially among the young officers among whom she came in contact, and she had had several offers of marriage which were highly advantageous in a worldly point of view; but none of her beaux had touched her heart, and she had persistently declared that she had no desire to marry, preferring to remain with her father and support his declining years.

Her last admirer was Lieutenant Charles Bent, who has already been introduced to the reader. He was a young Missourian, brave, spirited and intelligent, whose fortune or misfortune it was to have been born poor. Through the political influence of an uncle, he was admitted into the Military Academy at West Point, where he acquitted himself very creditably. After his graduation, he was breveted as a second

lieutenant, and was ordered to report to Major Benjamin Buttress, whom he accompanied on his expedition to New Mexico.

Charley Bent, as he was commonly called, thought it not presumptuous to fall in love with Fanny Buttress, as soon as he saw her, though it must have been evident, that a young lieutenant with nothing but his commission and his sword, was not likely to win the heart which had withstood the assaults of men who were much higher in rank, and of better worldly position. Whether he succeeded in doing so remains to be seen.

The young officer was not thrown in the company of Fanny as much as he wished to be, and when he approached her she held him at a distance, in a manner that was not very encouraging to his hopes. Nevertheless, with the ardent and enthusiastic mind of youth, which is ever reaching after the unattainable he continued to hope, and made his advances slowly and surely, as if he was determined to gain the position. It was his love for Fanny, and the hope of winning her, that caused him to court the favor of her father, and to endure with patience the petulant and unreasonable humor, and the overbearing manners of that cross-grained old martinet.

Hopeful as Charley Bent was, there was one person connected with the expedition, who was more hopeful, and with better cause. That person was Captain Andrew Sardis, a Virginian, and an officer of over thirty years of age, although he had recourse to the appliances of art to make himself appear younger. As a Virginian, a native of his own proud old State, Major Buttress strongly favored the pretensions of Captain Sardis. Besides, the captain's rank entitled him to marry, and his family was wealthy and influential. It was generally believed, therefore, that Sardis would ultimately carry off the prize. There were two persons, however, who refused to subscribe to this belief, and these were Charley Bent and Fanny Buttress. The former was unwilling to believe it, because his own hopes were too high to be overtopped by even the tall form of Captain Sardis. The latter had no thought of being won by the captain, because he was personally distasteful and even repugnant to her. So the matter stood, Captain Sardis having the advantage of Major

Buttress' favor, and the disadvantage of Fanny's disfavor, and Charley Bent feeling his way, and preparing to attack the enemy in front or flank, as the opportunity should present itself.

When Bent communicated to Captain Sardis the message which he had received from Major Buttress, the latter acknowledged its receipt by a haughty nod to his subordinate, and rode forward to join his commanding officer. He was tall and inclined to be portly, and his sandy hair, reddish whiskers, light eyebrows, and florid complexion, bespoke his Scotch descent. His disposition and his manners, also, were slightly tinged with the spirit of the "land o' cakes." Although brave, he was cautious to a fault; although rich, he was not lavish, except upon his own person; although earnest in his affections and resentments, he was careful not to betray them, except when he might do so without the fear of evil consequences. Withal, he was accounted a good soldier, a strict disciplinarian, a severe officer, and an unpleasant companion. He was fond of wearing his full uniform, and paid particular attention to the adornment of his outer man.

"This is a horrible road, major, if it can be called a road," said he, as he saluted his superior officer. "The wagons are stalled, and I really can not see how we are to get them over the mountains yonder."

"I have sent Lieutenant Bent to help the teamsters out of their difficulty," replied the major.

"Perhaps he will be able to do so; although he is a poor soldier, he may be a good wagon master. He has enough impudence to claim to be any thing."

"Impudence! I tell you, Andrew, there is no parallel to his impudence. What do you think he had the assurance to say to me a little while ago?"

"As likely as not, he told you that you were unfit to lead an expedition into this country."

"Not quite so bad as that, my boy, though, egad, he came very near saying as much. He says that the government doesn't know how to carry on war against the Indians, that our generals and other officers are ignoramuses, that the army is useless, that the regulations are absurd, and that nothing can be done but by forming a brigade of ragged coon-hunters

and muskrat-trappers, like some of the greasy scoundrels whom we used to meet in Missouri."

"His ideas of war must be very raw, if he calls this a war. It is like nothing but a hunt for fleas, and the only difficulty is to find them."

"Just what I told the fellow. Even then he had the impudence to remind me of General Braddock and old St. Clair, as if he wanted to compare me with those foolish and unfortunate commanders."

"He ought to be cashiered, or something should be done to teach him to keep his place. I understand, major, that he has the assurance to lift his eyes toward your daughter!"

"You surprise me, Andrew. I have never noticed any thing of the kind. You surely must have been misinformed."

"Not if I can still trust my sight and my hearing, which have never deceived me yet. I am sure that he does aim as high as I have said, and I have no doubt that he believes he is as likely to hit the mark as any body. I feel an interest in this subject, major, and I suppose that I notice more than you do."

"It must be looked into. The young fellow must be crazy, for he has neither rank nor money, and he ought to know, as it is generally understood among us all, that I have other and higher views for Fanny."

"I flatter myself that you have, my dear major, and I trust that I shall continue to merit your confidence. As for the fellow's being crazy, I think that he is afflicted with a species of lunacy, that is very prevalent in these times. The climate of the West is particularly favorable to the development of young America, and young America means a compound of impudence, conceit, and superficial acquirement, and boundless ambition. It is a disease, and that young man has it badly. It may spread among the command, and perhaps it would be well to take steps to stop it. I have known young ladies to be taken with it, and it must be admitted that Bent is a good-looking and quick-witted fellow."

"You don't mean to say that you are afraid of him, my dear boy, but you object to having a scattering fire on your flanks. I am inclined to think, myself, that some measures of precaution are both prudent and proper, and I shall take

advantage of a convenient opportunity to send young Bent out of the way for a while. I suppose that will suit you, Andrew?"

"I am not at all uneasy, sir. I was only speaking for the benefit of the command. By the way, major, do you know what sort of a road we shall find on the other side of this mountain-range?"

"We shall have to descend about fourteen miles over a very rough and mountainous section, as Bent informs me, and then he says that we will reach a good camping-place. I have found him very useful in many respects, though I have been careful not to excite his vanity by telling him so. I don't see how he gets hold of so much information."

"He makes it a point to talk with all the hunters and mountain-men he can pick up. For my part, I am not fond of rooting in such mire. I was asking about the route, major, because I understand that the section on the other side of the mountains is a great resort of the Indians, and it is possible that we may meet some of them before long."

"Bent suggested to me, a while ago, that he thought we would soon come up with the copper-colored scoundrels who tried to stampede us last night, but I am inclined to think that they are far away from us by this time. I have scouts out, however, and we may be able to catch them before they get wind of our approach. As for their catching us, you know that it is out of the question."

"It is possible that they may find us where we had rather not be found. This is a bad defile that we are in."

"It looks rather dangerous, I admit, but our scouts are in the advance, and there is no danger."

As a rather inappropriate ending to these confident words a few dropping shots were heard in front. Major Buttress halted the column, and sent Captain Sardis ahead to learn what was the matter. The captain soon returned, as rapidly as the nature of the ground would allow, followed by a portion of the dragoons who had been detailed to act as scouts.

Then arose Indian yells, wild, shrill and fierce, from each side of the defile, and volleys of musket-shots and arrows were poured into both flanks of the party. Several soldiers fell at the first fire, and the command was thrown into temporary

confusion. Major Buttress, whose horse had been shot under him, immediately rallied and formed his men, assisted by his officers; but they were so closely jammed together in the narrow defile, that little could be done in the way of defense or attack. The soldiers loaded and fired with regularity and rapidity, at their unseen foes, but their fire was comparatively harmless, while the murderous volleys were still poured in upon them from behind the rocks and trees.

Tired of this one-sided warfare, the major reluctantly ordered a retreat, and the troops countermarched out of the defile in good order, and fell back to the wagons, which had been halted a short distance in the rear. The Indians, as soon as they perceived that their adversaries were retreating, sent another volley into their close ranks, and rushed out from their concealment, to fall upon them with the tomahawk; but they soon discovered that they were unable to cope with the Americans at close quarters, and suffered them to retire without further molestation.

Major Buttress was angry. He was more than angry—he was furious. When he had placed his men in a secure position in the open ground, and had disposed the wagons and teams so as to afford a protection to his camp, he looked around for some object on which to vent his indignation, and he soon found what he was seeking.

Charley Bent was standing near him, with a rifle in his hand, conversing with a tall mountaineer. The major called to him, in a rough and peremptory tone, and Bent approached, accompanied by the mountaineer.

"What are you doing with that gun, sir?" sharply demanded the major. "Don't you know that it is contrary to the regulations? Is that a proper weapon for an officer and a gentleman?"

"I couldn't reach the Indians with my sword, sir," answered Bent, "and they were so concealed among the rocks and bushes, that it was even hard to find them with a bullet."

"What business had you with the Indians? You should have been at the rear, with the wagons, where you belonged."

"I didn't want to see our men shot down like sheep in that

pass, without trying to do something to help them, or to avenge their deaths?"

" You are insolent, sir, as well as insubordinate. I will show you what subordination means, before I am done with you, and will teach you that the regulations must be complied with. Who is this fellow with you?"

" This man, sir, is Bill Ward, the same whom I wished you to employ as a guide and scout before we left Taos. I thought you knew him."

" That vagabond mountain-man? What is he doing here?"

" During the last half-hour he has been amusing himself with shooting down the Indians, whom the soldiers were unable to find."

" Don't give me any impudence, Lieutenant Bent. What are you prowling about here for, Ward?"

" I ain't prowlin'," replied the mountaineer, with a scowl of displeasure.

" What do you want here?"

" Nothin'."

" What brought you here, then?"

" A mustang, till a cussed Navajoe shot him, and then my legs finished the job."

" I want to know what you are doing here in my camp?"

" Listenin' to your talk."

" You may hear something that will not suit you. I will have you arrested as a spy."

" Better wait till I've done my arrant. Here are some papers that I was told to give you."

" Why didn't you say so before? Who are they from?"

" They are from General Kearney. You kep' botherin' me with your talk," replied Ward, as he produced a bundle of papers.

The major eagerly opened one of the letters, and perused it with an appearance of satisfaction.

" This is news indeed," he said, rather petulantly. " A pretty way to break up an expedition that was so well planned, manned and provided. However, it suits me very well, as I may have a chance to fight some enemies that can be found. I am directed to report in person at Santa Fe as soon as possible, and to leave my battalion to follow at its leisure. I

know what is meant by 'as soon as possible,' and shall consult my own convenience and comfort. This will give you some work, Lieutenant Bent, which will probably please you, as you are so fond of galloping about the country. I will hand you some dispatches, in the morning, which you are to carry to Santa Fe. When you have delivered them, I wish you to report yourself under arrest, and I will prefer charges against you when I arrive at Santa Fe. You may take Sergeant Royston with you, and direct him to return with any dispatches that the General may wish to send me, and to meet me at Taos."

The young officer merely bowed, while his commander smiled grimly, and turned away to join Captain Sardis.

CHAPTER III.

THE PUEBLO.

At the foot of one of the southernmost spurs of the Rocky Mountains, on an elevation which overlooked a portion of the rich valley of Taos, was encamped a small party of Americans. The party consisted of Lieutenant Charley Bent, his friend Bill Ward, and Sergeant Royston, of the dragoons. Luke Royston was a medium-sized young man, well and compactly built, with blue eyes and curling light hair. He possessed a cheerful and smiling countenance, and a generous and impulsive disposition, which was about all he possessed in this world.

The evening was quite hot, and the three men, having thrown off their coats, were cooling themselves on the rich grass, under the dwarf oaks, whose scanty foliage hardly served to shield them from the burning rays of the western sun. In a little hollow, a short distance from where they were lying, was a small fire, at which a few pieces of meat were toasting.

"'Pears to me Charley," said Ward, as he raised himself to a sitting posture, "that you ain't in much of a hurry to carry those dispatches to Santa Fe, for the old bear."

"Of course I am not. I can guess their contents pretty well, and I am sure that there is no occasion for haste. The major tells about his little fight with the Navajoes, laying the blame on the scouts. Then he gives some rigmarole about the toilsome journey and the condition of the men and horses, mingled with abuse of the bad roads, and concludes by saying that he will be in Sante Fe as soon as possible. It may be a month before he gets there, and I see no reason why I should hurry, especially when I am ordered to report myself under arrest. I am not anxious to be deprived of my liberty, Bill Ward."

"It's natural that you shouldn't be, my boy. 'Pears as if the old bear must hev' some kind of a spite ag'in you. What's up atween you?"

"Can't say. I have never done any thing to give him cause to dislike me, though my ideas of Indian fighting are different from his, and I believe he thinks that I am rather too forward for a young man."

"I suppose the lieutenant would rather remain near the major's pretty daughter, and perhaps the major would rather have him somewhere else," suggested Royston, with a wink and a laugh.

"That's the way the trail runs," said Ward. "I knew that thar' must be a gal mixed up with the business, somehow. Own up, now, Charley, and tell us about the gal. Yer in love."

"There is no use in denying it. I think Fanny Buttress is the most beautiful girl I ever saw, and I do love her more than a little. This is a free country, and a man has a right to love the President's daughter, if he wants to. I have tried to keep my love to myself, so that the old major should not suspect it, but I suppose Captain Sardis has been putting his spoon in my pan. He wants Fanny, and the major favors him. I have no doubt that he has been keen enough to discover my secret, and mean enough to report it at head-quarters. If that is the case, I can account for the major's treatment of me, though I don't flatter myself that I have made any impression upon the young lady."

"Does the gal keer fur you, Charley?"

"I was just saying that she does not, as far as I know. She

has had many lovers, but I believe she has treated them all pretty much alike."

"Better give up the chase, my boy. Eagles are apt to fly too high fur rifle-bullets to reach 'em."

"But they have been known to stoop, and to be caught."

"True enough, but you had better give up the chase, and turn your 'tention to suthin' useful. I'm thinkin' they will sp'ile a good hunter in tryin' to make a poor sojer of you. You warn't made to work in harness, 'specially in a mule-team. Gals are onsartin critters, and they ken ruinate a man mighty easy. I got hitched to one once, many year ago, but we never pulled together, and we agreed to quit."

"That is news to me, Bill. Tell me about it."

"I don't want to think of it, and wouldn't hev' spoke of it, 'ceptin' to give you a warnin'. She was a Mexican, and a born beauty, and I was reckoned tol'able smart and handsome in those days. Her folks kinder got around her, a-coaxin' her, and thar' was trouble, and I wiped out one of 'em, and we agreed to quit, as I said afore."

"What became of your wife?"

"Don't know. Let's talk about suthin' else."

"For my part," said Luke Royston, "I intend to follow the advice of George Washington, and to keep clear of entangling alliances. I shall never allow any pretty face to draw me into trouble. I believe in a light heart and a heavy haversack."

"Perhaps light-heartedness and light-headedness go together in your case," suggested Bent.

"May be so; but I had rather be gay and simple than wise and miserable. The only thing that bothers me just now, is to know why we have been ordered back to this country of sand and sunshine, fleas and tortillas."

"Spect likely thar's trouble a-brewin' with the Mexicans," remarked Ward.

"What is the matter with them?" inquired Bent. "I understood that the people of New Mexico were peaceably inclined, that they had submitted quietly, and had transferred their allegiance to the United States."

"Quiet enough they may be at this minute, but thar's no tellin' how rampageous they will git inside of the next half

hour. The fact is, Charley, you can't turn Mexicans into Americans in a minute. Ginaler Kearney made 'em take the oath of legions, and told 'em they war' American citizens, but that don't change the natur' of the critters. All the legions of 'em will be ag'inst us, if they see a good chance to git the upper hand. They stay under now, 'cause they are afeard, but it will be a sorry day for the Americans when they git over thar skeer. They don't like to be annexed to the States, without havin' any say-so in the matter."

"Do you suppose they mean to rise against us?"

"Thar's no tellin', but I think it more likely than not. Ginaler Kearney is goin' to Californy, ef he hasn't set out already, and Colonel Doniphan, with the Missouri chaps, thinks of pushin' off to the southward, and then the Americans will be tol'able weak in this section. The greasy rascals will rise ef they dar' to."

"It will make fine times for us soldiers, and will afford us good chances of promotion."

"P'raps you will git promoted with a lance or a lasso. I tell you, Charley, these New Mexicans are mighty tricky and onsartin. The Pueblo Injuns are the best folks among 'em to my notion. They are tol'able decent and kinder Christian ; but the Mestizoes, and the raal Spanish Mexicans are wuss'n p'ison. But you will hev' a chance to know suthin' more about 'em afore long, fur thar is a hull gang of the greasers comin' up the road, from the pueblo yonder."

"I see the greasers, but what is it that you call the pueblo?" inquired Luke Royston.

"Don't you see that bush of mud-piles tharaway, across the river, lookin like a gopher town in a peraira? That's one of thar pueblos, as they call thar villages. I reckon the hull population hev turned out to meet us, or on some other kind of a scout. What are we best to do, boys? Shall we mount and ride away from here, or stay and wait fur 'em, or go down and meet 'em?"

The appearance of the throng which had just turned a bend of the road that wound upward from the river toward the foot of the mountain, was calculated to excite the curiosity of the Americans, if not their apprehensions. They were fifty or sixty in number, and of all colors except the pure white

and the pure black. A few of them were dressed in the fashion of the Americans and Europeans, but the majority wore a semi-Indian attire, or the gay serapes and wide trowsers of the lower order of Mexicans. Those who were the better-dressed rode fine horses, and the others were mounted on mustangs and mules. All were armed after a fashion, some bearing bows and arrows, others gayly-tipped lances, others muskets, and others swords and clubs. They seemed to endeavor to march in some sort of order, but the attempt only succeeded in rendering their straggling disarray more noticeable. At the head of the crowd, apparently the leader of the party, rode a tall priest, on a large and fine mule.

"What glorious fun it would be to charge down upon them," exclaimed Royston. "I think we could scatter the greasy ragamuffins, and drive every man of them into the river."

"You would be more likely to git your brains scattered over the road," remarked Ward.

"Perhaps we might be able to whip them," said Bent, "but we have no right to fight them unless we are attacked. We are at peace with these people, and it is our duty to treat them as friends until we know them to be enemies. Besides, they are beckoning to us, and are making signs of friendship."

"That's a fact," said Royston, "and I see a woman among them, too. It can't be that they have come out to look for a fight."

"We had better git onto our hosses, so that we ken be ready far a run," suggested Ward. "I don't like the looks of 'em, comin' out here armed, and in sech a crowd."

As the Americans untethered and mounted their horses, they perceived that the tall priest and another man in black had detached themselves from the main body of the Mexicans and were slowly advancing toward them, making signs of amity. Bill Ward took the lead, and rode down the slope with his companions, all keeping their rifles in hand, in order to be on their guard against treachery. They were soon met by the Mexicans, who halted and extended their hands as the Americans approached them.

The first, a dark-skinned and somber man, with piercing dark eyes overshadowed by his broad-brimmed hat, addressed the Americans in the Spanish tongue, with which Ward and

Bent were pretty well acquainted, and assured them that the intentions of his people were perfectly friendly. They had heard, he said, that some noted horse-thieves were encamped near the foot of the mountain, and had gone out to capture them, but were agreeably surprised at finding a few of their friends the Americans, instead of a gang of desperadoes. In conclusion, he invited them to visit the pueblo, promising them rest and refreshment and a merry time, and introduced to them his companion, as the alcalde and cacique of the Mexican-Indian population. His own name, he said, was Padre Abrojo.

Although there were some suspicious circumstances connected with the padre's statement and the appearance of his followers, Ward and his friends accepted his invitation as cordially as it appeared to be given, and accompanied him to the road, where they were soon surrounded by the motley and miscellaneous mass of Mexicans. Headed by the padre and the alcalde and with the Americans in front, the crowd straggled down the road to the river, which they easily forded, as there was scarcely enough water in it, at that season, to float a canoe. Then a short ride brought them to the village, a collection of about eighty houses, built of adobes, or sun-burned bricks. These habitations were mostly one storied, and were set in regular order, along a neat and clean street. At the head of the street, fronting on a little square or plaza, was a two-storied building, of more pretentious size and architecture than the others. The greater part of the escort dispersed themselves about the village, while Padre Abrojo and the alcalde, together with a few of the more important personages, halted in front of a large one-story house, which they invited the Americans to enter.

The latter expressed their willingness to accept the invitation, if their conductors would show them the way. For their own part, although they perceived a little window through which shone the light of a lamp, they could see no door, or other means of entrance. The difficulty was soon solved, for a ladder was let down from the roof, which the padre quickly ascended, tucking up his skirts, and signing to the others to follow them. The horses were taken in charge by some peons, and the Americans mounted the ladder, with the remainder of the Mexicans at their heels. They reached the

tiled roof of the building, just in time to see the priest disappear down a trap-door, and they followed him, descending a short ladder, until their feet rested on the tiled floor of a large room. They could see, by the dim light of the little lamp at the window, that the building was divided by an adobe partition, and that dark forms were seated around the room, against the walls.

"This is a strange way of entering a house, padre," said Lieutenant Bent. "It would seem more easy and natural to come in through a door."

"It might be more easy, but less secure," replied the priest. "We have been subject to depredations of the Indians, but I hope we will not be troubled by them any more, now that we are to be protected by the great and powerful government of the United States. Besides, this mode of entering our houses has been customary with us for ages, having been handed down to us by our Aztec forefathers."

"Aztec!" exclaimed Bent; "I must have heard that word in a dream, or have read it in some forgotten history, for it does not seem real. Is it possible that your people are the descendants of the Aztec race?"

"We are, indeed, the representatives of that nation, the oldest on this continent. These warriors whom you see around you are all children of the great Montezuma."

The men having descended the ladder, a girl or young woman followed them. She came tripping lightly down the steps, and took a seat in a corner of the room.

"I told you that there was a woman among them," whispered Luke Royston. "Did you see her, lieutenant, as she came down the ladder? Her eyes shone under that queer little shawl that she wore on her head like a pair of the biggest kind of diamonds. What a foot and ankle she has! I am willing to swear that she's a beauty. Wonder if they are going to give us a fandango in this ranche."

"If they do give us a fandango," replied Bent, "I am afraid they may make us dance in the air. I don't like the appearance of things here, and Bill Ward looks suspicious."

A number of wax candles were lighted in different parts of the room, rendering all the objects within it quite plain to

the three Americans. They perceived that the forms which they had dimly seen seated against the walls were long-haired and dark-featured Indians, dressed in short breeches and woolen jackets, and armed with short, heavy swords, like machetes. In one corner stood a veiled woman, dressed in black, and in another was seated the girl who had just descended the ladder. She, also, was attired in dark colors, picked out with dainty ribbons and bits of lace. From under her short dress peeped one delicate foot, like a young chicken peering at the world beneath the shadow of its mother's wing, and one of her bright black eyes, hardly hidden by the fanciful folds of her reboso, easily outshone the feeble glimmer of the candles. In the middle of the room was a long table, and on the walls were hung Catholic pictures of the Virgin, and of saints, strangely mingled with uncouth figures of earthen ware, which looked much like the idols of the ancient Aztecs. There was no other visible furniture of the room, except a few benches and chairs.

Padre Abrojo furnished the Americans with seats, and politely offered to relieve them of their weapons. Bent and Royston quietly gave up their rifles, but Bill Ward objected to this procedure, and was only induced by the persuasions of his companions to yield up his faithful weapon.

The rifles were taken into another room, from which some supper was brought out and placed on the table, and the three friends were invited to draw up their chairs and eat. They willingly complied, and partook of their tortillas and coffee in silence, as the Mexicans showed no disposition to converse. When they had finished, the padre took a candle and requested them to follow him to their sleeping apartment. He led them through a door in the side of the room, which they had not previously noticed, and down a short flight of steps, into a dark place that seemed like a cellar. He then opened another door, ushering them into a square room, placed the candle on a bracket, bid them good-night, and bolted the door upon them. Directly they heard the key turn in the door at the head of the steps.

CHAPTER IV

DOLORES.

"THIS looks like a dungeon, and it feels like one," said Bent as he glanced around the room.

It was about twelve feet square, with the floor and walls of adobes, while the roof seemed to be formed of boards laid upon stout joists. No light could enter from without, and there were apparently no means of ventilation. A pile of blankets lay in one corner, but there was no other furniture in the cool and damp room.

"'Tain't nothin' else but a dungeon, and I don't like the looks of things one bit," replied Bill Ward. "The yaller rascals have got us here, and they mean to keep us."

"Why should they wish to do so?" inquired Royston.

"Because we are Americans, and they are Mexicans; that is reason enough. For my part, I wish I was well out of the scrape."

"I did not think that you could be frightened so easily, Ward. I see no reason to apprehend any danger. If they had wanted to kill us there was nothing to hinder them from doing so. I think they have treated us very cleverly and kindly, and we ought to consider them friends, rather than enemies. I feel perfectly contented, for I believe they will let us out in the morning, and then I will have a chance to see that black-eyed beauty again."

"I ain't afraid to die, young man, any more'n you are, but I don't like bein' shut up in this hole, and I allow that I ain't goin' to stand it. Do you know whar they put our rifles, Charley?"

"In a room adjoining that in which they gave us our supper."

"That room, I reckon, mought be somewhar over this here place."

"I think so."

"Those weepons, then, are to be had for the tryin'. 'Pears like I can't sleep away from old true-center."

"I think we had better wait awhile, Bill, before attempting to do any thing that might anger the Mexicars. It is possible that they mean to act toward us in a friendly manner, and we ought not to give them cause to treat us as enemies."

"Jest as you say; I'll wait till mornin', ef you want me to, but won't promise to hold on any longer. I tell you what it is, my boy; this old hoss will split, if he is kept penned up in this crib much longer. He an't used to bein' out of the smell and feel of the fresh air."

"You speak as if you had never been shut up before."

"I was put into the calabozza at Sauta Fe once, but I bu'st the consarn open powerful quick."

The opening of a wicket in the door made them all look around, and they saw, framed in the aperture, a very pretty face, with a pair of sparkling black eyes which could belong to no one but the Mexican girl who had accompanied them to the pueblo.

Luke Royston rushed eagerly to the door, but the girl rebuked his presumption by dropping over her features the vail or light shawl which she wore on her head.

"How do you feel, Americanos? Are you cold?" she asked, in musical broken English, and with a merry laugh.

"I was freezing a moment ago; but the beams of your bright eyes have thawed me," answered Royston.

"Soft metal is easy to melt; lead will not stand the fire as well as iron. Are your companions warm?"

"I ken answer fur one of 'em," said Bill Ward. "I am gittin' heated up tol'able fast, and ef I keep on growin' madder, I shall be b'ilin' hot afore long. I would jest like to know, gal, what your folks has cooped us up in this hole fur, and how long they mean to keep us here. I am afeard that they ain't goin' to do right by us."

"We have often heard of Bill Ward, and we have thought that he was a man who could not be made afraid. Why should he be frightened?"

"I don't mean to say that I am skeered, gal, and you know well enough what I do mean; I ain't a man to be frightened

but I must confess that I am suspicious of the slippery and tricky ways of your folks."

"Why are you troubled? You have enough to eat, and you are not harmed. What more do you want?"

"I want to git out of this here hole; I can't more'n half-way breathe in it, and it don't smell to suit me. My natur' is used to fresh air and plenty of it. Ef you mean well by us, you will let us out of this den."

The girl laughed merrily and musically.

"Have patience," she said, "and wait until you are taken out by those who brought you here. You ought to say your prayers and go to sleep."

"I ain't used to sleepin' without my rifle. Do you know where they put our weepons, gal? Ef you want to be clever you will git 'em and bring 'em to us."

"What have I to do with that? It is no affair of mine. What is the name of the officer?"

"Charles Bent, at your service," replied the lieutenant, stepping forward.

The girl started, and looked at him more closely.

"Are you the son of William Bent, the old trader who has been appointed governor by the Yankees?"

"Much as I would like to be the son of a governor, I am obliged to confess that I am not related to him."

"You need not wish it. What is your name, señor?" continued the girl, with a smile to Royston.

"My name is Luke Royston, and I am the humble slave of your bright eyes and your sweet lips."

"What a hard name! I must call you Señor Luco, as that is much easier. I should think, from your dress, that you are a slave of the Yankee flag. Are you tired of staying here?"

"Not while you are present, Bright Eyes."

"You may call me Dolores. Suppose I go away?"

"I should be in darkness and despair."

"Would you like to go with me?"

"Would I like to live and breathe? Your eyes would give me light, and your smile would give me warmth. I will follow yo' even to the end of the world, if you will let me."

" You talk very well for a slave. Will you promise that you will not attempt to run away from me?"

" I will never leave you, as long as you will permit me to remain with you. I could not run away from you."

" But do you promise?"

" I do, most sacredly."

" Can you dance?"

" With you I can."

" Very well. I will let you out, if your friends will not try to follow you."

" They are good fellows, and I can answer for them that they will not trouble you."

Dolores unlocked the door, and held it ajar, so that the young man could pass out. Bill Ward looked wistfully at the opening, but neither he nor Bent attempted to take advantage of the chance afforded them by the girl, who was evidently seeking to benefit their comrade.

Royston quickly slipped out, and eagerly seized the hand of Dolores, but she gently repelled him, locked the door which she had opened, and ascended the steps, telling him to follow her as noiselessly as possible.

The door at the head of the steps had been left ajar, and they quietly entered the large apartment on the ground floor, where two Mexicans were sleeping soundly and snoring loudly.

They then mounted to the roof, Royston taking the lead, and descended to the street, which they found quiet and deserted. The night was not sufficiently dark to prevent them from easily finding their way.

Dolores, permitting her companion to hold one of her taper-fingers, tripped lightly over the hard and beaten ground, enjoining silence upon the young man, until, at the sight of some dark forms a little way in the distance, she quickly turned aside, and walked in the shadow of the low and gloomy adobe buildings.

" What is the matter?" asked Royston. " Who were those people?"

" The watch."

" Who are the watch?"

" People who are employed to attend to every body's

business but their own. I would not wish them to see you, as they might trouble themselves to inquire who you are."

In a few moments they reached a large house, from which the light streamed through several loopholes and crevices. The sound of music within could be heard, mingled with laughter and the pattering of the dancers' feet.

The girl passed by this house, however, and entered, through a narrow door, a smaller building, in the chief apartment of which an old woman was seated, by the light of a dim taper. She ushered Royston into another room, where she showed him a pair of wide Mexican trowsers and a gay-colored serape, which she directed him to put on over his uniform.

When the young man had thus transformed himself into a caballero, he came out, and Dolores completed the transformation by covering his head with a wide-brimmed sombrero, and furnishing his belt with a pair of pistols and a knife. She then led him to the fonda, or dance-house, cautioning him that he must not attempt to speak, as she intended to represent him to be her dumb cousin from El Paso del Norte.

Royston assented, and promised obedience, although he could not see the necessity of adopting a disguise and a new character, if the New Mexicans were friendly to the Americans, and if no harm was really intended to himself and his friends. Dolores had directed him, and her word had already become a law to him.

The house was entered by means of a door, and Royston immediately found himself in a large room, hot, close-smelling and poorly lighted, filled with Mexicans and Indians of both sexes. He was quick to perceive that he was the only American in the room, and he concluded that there was some reason for the caution that Dolores had given him. At tables in the corners of the room, tawny Mexicans, and Pueblo Indians with still darker skins, were engaged playing monte, while the rest of the floor was occupied by the dancers, who moved to the music of a violin, a tamborine, and several pairs of castanets. The dance was a rather wild but pleasant mixture of waltz and quadrille, with such variations as the individual performers chose to introduce. Pu.que was freely circulating among the players and the dancers.

Dolores brought a glass of the refreshing drink for her companion, and one for herself, touching her lip with her finger, to cause him to remember the caution which she had given him with regard to silence. As Royston drank the pulque, several persons approached Dolores, and spoke to her in Spanish. It was easy for the young man to guess that they were inquireing concerning himself, and that the girl was explaining that he was her dumb cousin from El Paso. The questioners appeared to be satisfied, although one or two of them looked at him suspiciously.

In a few moments Dolores signified her readiness to dance, and gave her hand to Royston, who eagerly accepted it, and they whirled away in a sort of waltz, the step of which the young man easily caught. As they circled swiftly among the mazy crowd of dancers, hand in hand, and face to face, and as the maiden's countenance became animated, and her cheeks glowed with the exercise and excitement, Royston felt that his heart was no longer his own, that it belonged entirely to Dolores. He forgot his boasts that he could never be sufficiently captivated by any woman to allow her to trouble him. He thought that he could never tire of holding that soft hand and gazing into those large and liquid black eyes.

But the dance came to an end, and the couple retired to the side of the room, where the hand of Dolores was claimed for another dance, and she was taken from her companion, who found it easy to keep silence, as he was intently occupied in gazing at her.

During this dance, a tall and dark-featured Mexican, adorned with a quantity of gaudy finery, who had been scowling savagely at Royston, twice approached the young man as if to speak to him, and at last brushed roughly against him, almost knocking him down. As this was evidently no accident, Royston became indignant, and laid his hand upon his knife, but was checked by a sign from Dolores, whose keen eyes had seen what had happened.

As soon as the dance was ended, she went to him and directed him in a whisper to slip out of the door. He obeyed unquestioningly, and she followed him, and led him rapidly toward the small house in which he had assumed his disguise.

"What does this mean, Dolores?" he asked. "That fellow insulted me, and I wanted to punish him."

"Be quiet, and hasten. That was Manuel."

"Who is Manuel?"

"A man who says that he loves me, and who pretends to dictate with whom I shall dance and to whom I shall speak."

Royston was about to say something severe concerning Manuel, but he had reached the small house, and was hurried in at the narrow door by Dolores, who locked it behind her. The old woman was sleeping on a sort of lounge.

"Now, Señor Luco," said the girl, "you must remain here for the present. Will you give me your word that you will do so?"

"Until when?"

"You must not go out of this house until I return."

"When will you return?"

"As soon as possible. To-morrow, I hope."

"I must promise, if you insist. But, why do you wish it?"

"Because you will be safe here, and you may not be safe elsewhere."

"I am glad that you feel an interest in my safety, for I love you, Dolores."

"Oh, you are not certain of that. You have known me but a little while."

"I am certain; I swear it. Will you love me, Dolores?"

"How can I tell? You ought not to say that you love me until you know me better. Remember that you have promised to remain here, and you must do as I have told you. You may sleep in that little room which you have seen, and the old woman will wait on you. Good-night."

"Good-night, dear Dolores. Hasten back to me, for I shall be lost without you."

The girl hastily stepped out of the door, leaving the young soldier to his reflections, which were of a very sentimental and romantic nature.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHILDREN OF THE SUN.

BILL WARD and Lieutenant Bent looked at each other significantly when Royston left their prison-room, the former half regretting that he had not made an attempt to escape, and the latter interested and amused by the affection which seemed to have so suddenly sprung up between the young soldier and Dolores.

"Luke has been smitten," said Bent. "He boasted that he would never allow a pretty face to lead him into trouble, and we now see what his boasting was worth. I can't blame him, however, for the Mexican girl is pretty enough to fascinate a man of wood."

"I don't like the looks of it, nohow," remarked Ward. "That gal is a dangerous critter, and I ken jest see the wickedness oozin' out of her black eyes. Thar's no tellin' what devilment she may lead the boy into, and I only hope that he may not be any wuss off than we are."

"I think she will do him no harm, Bill, for it is plain that she has taken a fancy to him."

"Such a fancy as a wolf takes to a sheep, I am afeard. We are in a bad enough fix in this hole, Charley, but it wculd hev been better fur him to stay with us."

"You are getting to be a terrible croaker, Bill. I am sure that you have been in a worse scrape a hundred times. Why should these people, who have treated us in a friendly manner, wish to harm us?"

"Jest because we are Americans, and they are naturally tricky and onsartin."

"The New Mexicans have submitted very quietly, as I understand. Do you suppose that they mean to rise against the Americans?"

"Ef you want to be supposin', you may as well suppose one thing as another. It is sartin that they didn't submit because they wanted to."

"Whether they want to or not they will be obliged to, as long as our government holds this country. I shall not trouble myself any more about them at present, but will go to sleep. I believe that we will be released from this place in the morning, and allowed to go our way."

"It seems as ef I can't do any sleepin' without old True-center by my side, but I may as well try."

The two friends selected some blankets from the pile in the corner, laid down on the ground, and soon fell asleep. Bill Ward, contrary to his usual habit, was restless and uneasy, but Bent slumbered soundly and peacefully, until he was aroused by the opening of the door.

Both started up, and instinctively reached for their rifles. Not finding them, they arose and confronted the intruder, whom they recognized as Padre Abrojo.

"Do not be disturbed, my children; there is no cause for alarm," said the priest, as he examined the room by the aid of a small lamp which he carried in his hand.

"It ain't our natur' to git skeered," replied Ward; "neither are we used to bein' penned up in sech a hole as this. We are white men and Americans, and we want to know why you put us here, and when you are goin' to let us out."

"All in good time, my friends. You should have patience. You are safe, and no one harms you."

"That's jest what the gal said, but we don't like to be shet up here."

"Who said it?"

"The gal who took the young soger out."

"What girl? Who was she?"

"That Mexican gal, with the big black eyes."

"Her name is Dolores," suggested Bent.

The padre's face darkened, but the cloud quickly vanished, as if he had chased it away.

"Perhaps," said he, "she wished to show him how our villagers can dance. She has acted imprudently, for it would have been safer for your friend to remain with you. You were brought to this room because it is a place of security. Some of my countrymen are prejudiced against the Americans, and they might trouble you if you were straying about the pueblo."

"But when are you going to let us out of this place?" persisted Ward. "We don't ask any body to take keer of us, and we don't want to stay in your pueblo."

"All in good time, my friend; but you must have a little patience. I have come to request this officer to walk a little way with me."

"Why not take me with him?"

"My reasons are my own. Will you not allow me to choose my own company? Will you walk with me, Señor Capitano? I may show you something strange that will interest you."

"What will become of my friend?" replied Bent. "I am unwilling to leave him alone in this place."

"Nothing can harm him here. He will be released when you return, if not sooner."

"That ought to be satisfactory, as we can procure no better terms," said Bent, with a meaning glance at Ward. "Keep up your spirits, Bill, until I see you again. Will I not soon return, Padre Abrojo?"

"We will not walk far," replied the priest.

The young officer had suddenly conceived the idea that by accepting this invitation, he might make some discoveries and take some measures that would benefit himself and his friends. Consequently, he was willing to leave Ward for the present, and gladly followed his conductor up-stairs.

When they reached the roof by means of the ladder, Bent perceived that it was day, although the sun had not yet risen. On the roof were several natives, who were kneeling, as if engaged in prayer, with their faces turned toward the east, where the roseate flushes of dawn proclaimed that the king of day was about to appear.

The priest also fell upon his knees and joined in the devotions, until the sun had fairly risen. Then, after standing up a few moments, and gazing intently at the luminary, he beckoned to Bent to follow him, and descended to the street.

Two mules were awaiting him at the foot of the ladder, one of which he caused his companion to bestride, and mounted the other himself. They proceeded briskly out of the pueblo, over a desert plain, to a grove of tall trees, with which was

mingled a thicket of undergrowth, so dense and thorny that it appeared impossible to force a passage through it.

The priest, however, soon discovered a narrow and winding path which had been cut into the chaparral, along which he led his young companion, until they reached a sort of clearing, where there were but a few large trees, although the ground was thickly covered by the heavy undergrowth that abounded in the grove.

The ride had thus far been quite a silent one, few words, and those few of an unimportant nature, having been spoken by Bent or his conductor; but the young man, unable any longer to repress his curiosity, brought his mule to a halt, and demanded to be informed for what purpose he had been brought into that wilderness.

"A wilderness, do you call it?" replied Padre Abrojo. "I must admit that it now appears to be a wilderness, but it was far different when the Children of the Sun were numerous and powerful. To me it still seems crowded with the great men of the past and their works, although to your eyes it is simply a desolation. If you look closely, you will perceive fragments of what were once wonderful buildings, and you will soon learn that the destroying hand of time has not entirely laid them in ruins."

Impressed by the solemn tones and mournful manner of the padre, Bent looked about him, and saw heaps of rubbish here and there, among which could be distinguished a few stones, uncouthly carved, peeping out from the dirt and the tangled growth of vines and bushes. Convinced that he was on the site of one of the temples, if not one of the cities that had flourished in the days of the Incas, he confessed his curiosity, and signified his willingness to proceed.

They went on, until they came to a hill of irregular form, thickly overgrown by the luxuriant vegetation peculiar to the country. Here the padre dismounted, and tied his mule to a tree, requesting Bent to follow his example. The young man obeyed, and his conductor, putting aside a mass of leafy vines, led him through a small and dark excavation, into what appeared to be a large hall, the low roof of which was supported by numerous massive pillars, covered with grotesque carvings. By the dim light that prevailed, coming from some unseen

source, it could be perceived that the temple, or whatever it was, had been repaired and kept in order by the labor of modern times.

The padre then showed the way to a small recess, shut off from the great hall, and lighted by a small lamp. Here a collation was set out on a stone table, consisting of tortillas, fried beans, and a very tender and juicy kind of meat. He sat down and commenced to eat, inviting his companion to do the same, and Bent found the breakfast very much to his taste. During the meal he again expressed his curiosity, asking by whom this strange and semi-subterranean edifice had been erected, for what purpose it had originally been designed, how it had been preserved from ruin, and to what use it was then applied.

"This was a temple of the Sun," answered the padre. "Many such, and many greater temples, have crumbled and are lost, but a few have been saved, protected by the spirit of Montezuma. Many of our people believe that he will return, to free them from the yoke of the strangers, and this is kept in order, to be ready for his coming. You will soon see how it is used in these days."

As soon as the repast was finished they went out into the hall, the upper end of which was suddenly illuminated by means of a circular aperture, through which the beams of the sun poured without interruption, falling upon a large stone altar. Behind the altar was a life-size statue of a man, dressed in the garb of an Indian monarch, and the light was so arranged that the statue seemed to stand in it and be enveloped by it.

As the young officer was drawn by his companion into the shadow of a pillar, two dark-robed priests approached the altar, followed by about twenty Indian men and women clothed in white, who fell on their knees, with their faces toward the altar and the statue. After remaining in this position for a few moments, they sprung to their feet, and commenced chanting, in a tongue with which Bent was unacquainted, a wild and barbarous hymn, their shrill voices being accompanied by sharp-toned drums and stringed instruments which were not visible from where he was standing.

At the close of the song they fell back, and two tall

warriors, richly attired, entered from a subterranean apartment, bringing, in a golden basin, a few coals of fire, at which all bowed reverently. The fire was laid upon the altar, the warriors holding their crossed spears over it, and the priests laid on the coals some pieces of light wood, which they fanned into a flame, from which arose a thick smoke of a slightly pungent and very fragrant odor.

Then the drums and stringed instruments again struck up, and the white-robed men and women surrounded the altar and the statue, with joined hands, dancing a slow and monotonous measure. When the dance was finished, the two warriors lowered their spears, carefully gathered the remaining bits of fire into the basin, and returned to the place from which they had come. The light was suddenly shut off, and when Bent's eyes had become accustomed to the comparative darkness, he perceived that the priests and Indians had disappeared.

"You have seen, my son," said Padre Abrojo.

"I have seen, it is true, but I do not understand. I thought your people were Christians."

"We are Catholics, in some matters of form, but it is not an easy matter to change the religion of such a race as ours. The worshipers whom you have seen are Children of the Sun, descendants of Montezuma, and it is thus that they adore the Source of Light, and honor the memory of their great father, praying him to return and deliver them from bondage. Come with me, and I will show you a still stranger sight."

Curious to see and hear more concerning these people and their strange proceedings, Bent silently followed his guide, who took the small lamp from the recess in which they had eaten, lifted a stone from the floor at the side of the hall, and led the way down a flight of ten or twelve stone steps, at the foot of which further progress was barred by a wall and a stout wooden door.

The padre opened the door and requested Bent to enter, placing the lamp in his hand.

"Why do you not go first?" inquired the young man, with a touch of suspicion.

It is forbidden to me to enter that room at present; but you, who are of a different religion, may do as you please."

Disarmed of his suspicion, Bent stepped within the door. As soon as he had done so, it was closed and bolted on the outside by the padre, and he once more found himself a prisoner.

CHAPTER VI.

BILL WARD'S DISCOVERIES.

"PERHAPS this may be all right, but it is sartin that I don't like it at all," muttered Bill Ward, when he found himself alone in the unpleasant underground room which he was bound to consider a prison.

The honest hunter had good reason for feeling suspicious and angry. He well knew the crafty and deceitful character of the New Mexicans, and felt quite sure that no good was intended to himself and his companions, by the course of conduct which had been pursued toward them since they were brought into the pueblo. He knew, also, that the inhabitants were indignant at the summary manner in which they had been "annexed" by General Kearney, who had at once declared them to be American citizens, compelled them to take an oath of allegiance, and proceeded to appoint officers to govern them. He considered it certain that they did not regard the oath as binding, that they had only submitted because they had been compelled to, and that they would endeavor to throw off the yoke of the strangers as soon as they could see a reasonable chance of success. Under such circumstances it was natural that they should be anxious to get possession of himself and his companions, of whom one was an officer and the other an unusually intelligent soldier, while he himself had often served the army in the capacity of a guide and scout.

He felt, also, somewhat vexed at his two friends for having left him alone when they went on their private errands of love and curiosity. Although he understood the meaning of the look which Bent gave him when he accepted the invitation of Padre Abrojo, he thought that the young officer

would be more likely to get into trouble himself than to render him any assistance.

While he was brooding over these matters, the wicket in the door was opened, and a plentiful breakfast was handed in to him by a peon. He endeavored to stop this man and to ask him some questions concerning the house and its people, and concerning the cause and probable duration of his imprisonment; but the man abruptly closed the wicket, and shuffled off without making any reply. The captive then had nothing to do but to eat his breakfast, taking care to save some scraps of the bread and meat, as an emergency might arise in which he might need them.

In due course of time some dinner was brought to him in the same way, together with a supply of tapers, from which he concluded that his stay in that den was not likely to terminate very soon. As Lieutenant Bent had not returned, and as he had heard nothing of Luke Royston, he surmised that they had been enticed away in order that they might be separated from him, and that they were in the same trouble, if not in a worse predicament.

The old hunter's nature was one of those which can not endure to be shut up in any sort of a prison, and when he had made up his mind that he was really a prisoner, he immediately began to think about making his escape.

He took the light, and carefully examined the walls and floor of his dungeon, but they were too thick and strong to be easily forced. It would not have been difficult to take up some of the bricks of the floor, and it was possible that he might dig through the earth until he could reach the outer air and light; but that would have been too long a process, and there was every chance of discovery before he could complete the work.

His thoughts settled upon the ceiling as the most practicable way of escape. It was true, if he should make his exit in that direction, that he would be likely to encounter some of the Mexicans, but it would lead him to the place in which his rifle and those of his companions had been put away, and he felt that he would be unable to accomplish any thing unless he could regain possession of his trusty weapon. After an examination of the ceiling, he concluded to make the attempt at night.

Night came. That is, his supper came, which indicated that night was near at hand. He had not heard any thing of his friends, and he had seen no one but the peon who brought his meals. Resolved that his prison should not hold him until the dawn of another day, he commenced his work.

The ceiling was composed, as has been stated, of boards laid upon stout joists. He had noticed that two or three of the boards had been sawed across, in such a manner as to lead him to think that it might have been done for the purpose of forming a trap-door. Standing on the pile of blankets, he pushed up against these boards, and perceived that they yielded somewhat to the pressure, although the door did not open. He then felt through the cracks with his knife, and discovered that the resistance was caused by a carpet or grass matting, which was laid over the floor of the room above.

It was not a difficult, though a rather tedious task, to cut through this obstacle, and he at last had the satisfaction of knowing that he could easily lift up the trap.

He raised it accordingly, with great caution, fearing that the room might be occupied, and that his proceedings might be discovered. Peering through the opening, he saw a small and neatly-furnished apartment, lighted by a wax candle. It was evident that it belonged to some person of the softer sex, but he could see no signs of the presence of the occupant.

Satisfied with his scrutiny, he uncovered the trap, put his elbows through the hole, and drew himself up into the room. As this movement required considerable muscular exertion, it was attended by a slight noise, sufficient to awaken a woman who lay on a sort of lounge in a corner, covered with a large shawl.

This woman, although she had fully reached the middle age, had not ceased to be beautiful. Her chief attractions were the purity of her complexion, the loose masses of her abundant dark hair, and her large and brilliant black eyes. She had lain down in her clothes, and was entirely hidden from view by the shawl with which she was covered. As she awoke she threw off the light drapery, and started up, fixing

Upon the intruder a look of surprise and terror, and uttering a slight exclamation.

Ward rose to his feet, and gazed at her in wonder and uncertainty. He had supposed that the room was unoccupied, but here was a woman before him, an antagonist with whom he did not know how to deal. When his eyes had become accustomed to the light, his uncertain gaze changed to an earnest expression of interest, and he bent forward and looked inquiringly at the woman.

For her part, her eyes brightened with a look of recognition, but her cheeks flushed, and her brow darkened, as if thoughts of fear and trouble were mingled with the recognition. At last her lips parted, and she spoke to him in soft and musical Spanish.

"Is it you, señor? William, is it you?"

"It is me, Anna. Is this indeed you?", replied Ward, in the same tongue, which he spoke without the peculiarities of pronunciation which marked his use of his own language.

"This is something wonderful; where have you come from? How do you happen to be here?"

"It is wonderful and unexpected to me, Anna; I had no thought of meeting you here."

"Did you not come to seek me, then?"

"No; I was trying to get away from this place."

"I do not know what you mean. But you speak tenderly, and there is no cruel look in your eyes. Do you hate me, señor?"

"Hate you, Anna? I have never hated you. Why do you ask?"

"They told me that you hated me, and that you had sworn to kill me."

"They told you lies."

"Are you still my husband?"

"I am. Come to me, Anna."

The woman's face brightened with joy as she quickly stepped forward, and the husband and wife, after a long separation, were folded in each other's arms.

"I have much to explain to you, now that I have learned that you do not hate me," said she, smiling through tears;

"but you must first tell me how you happen to be here, and why you were trying to get away."

"I came here last evening, with two other Americans, and I have good reason to suspect that your Mexicans do not mean to let me go."

"Is it possible? Were you one of the prisoners?"

"You have spoken the right word, though we only accepted a friendly invitation and had no thought of being made prisoners until last night, when we were shut up in a dungeon."

"I saw the men when they were brought in, but it was dark, and my face was covered with my vail, so that I did not recognize you. My brother knew you, of course?"

"Your brother?"

"Padre Abrojo."

"I thought your brother's name was Colatzin, as yours is."

"It is; but he now calls himself Padre Abrojo."

"But I killed your brother."

"You thought you had killed him, but he lived. When you fled the country, he caused the report to be circulated that he had died of his wounds, and he changed his name, so that you might not return. It was he who caused the trouble between us. He could not forgive me for having married an American, and would not be satisfied until he separated us. He said that the marriage was improper and unlawful, and he stirred up strife between us. He told me, and brought men to prove it, that you had sworn to kill me, and it was through fear that I left you, taking my child, and concealed myself from you. I have often heard of you, and have known that you were leading a wild and solitary life."

"It is true, Anna. I have become rough and uncivilized, and have kept apart from the world, loving nothing but my rifle and my free life. What became of the child?"

The voice of the hunter, which had frequently exhibited signs of emotion during this conversation, trembled as he asked the last question.

"She is here. She was in the room last evening when you were brought here, if she did not come with you. She is called Dolores Colatzin, and I am known here as Señora Colatzin."

"Is it possible? That tall girl, with the splendid dark eyes, like your own?"

"She is your daughter."

"She took one of my friends out of our prison last night, and I was sure that she was going to lead him into trouble."

"I will look to the matter, though I do not think she meant to harm him. At present we must think about yourself, for you are in danger here. It must be that my brother knows you, and you may be sure that he does not mean you any good."

"Give me my rifle, and show me how I may leave the house, and I will have no fear of him and the whole pueblo."

"Your rifle is here, but you could not leave at present, as the only way is through the other room. Some men are in there now, and others are expected every moment. They are —but I ought not to tell you what they mean to do."

"Anna, perhaps my life is at stake."

"You must know it, señor, though I am betraying my own countrymen. Remain here, and in a short time you will be able to see and hear them. They will not enter this room, and we will not be disturbed."

Certain that some mischief was brewing, and anxious, for his own sake, as well as for the sake of his companions, to learn what it was, Ward seated himself by the side of his wife, and occupied the time in conversation, until she arose, and led him to the adobe partition which separated the two rooms. Telling him to be very quiet, she removed a brick from the wall, so that he could look through and see what was going on in the other apartment.

He saw half a dozen men, white Mexicans and Indians, seated around the table, on which some papers and maps were lying. Padre Abrojo, who took the lead, was speaking in Spanish, occasionally interrupted by the questions and remarks of the others. Ward soon discovered that the padre was explaining the nature and particulars of an organization under which the Mexicans and Indians were to rise, massacre the Americans and all officers appointed by them, and take forcible possession of the government. He stated that General Kearney had gone to California, and Colonel Doniphan had moved down into Chihuahua with his force, leaving

comparatively few Americans in New Mexico. The present was the time for the New Mexicans to show themselves men, and, by a vigorous effort, to throw off the yoke of the hated Yankees. Their victims could be so selected and surprised, beginning with Governor Bent, that a great part of the work could be done without coming into conflict with the United States troops. The precise time and manner in which the rising was to commence were not settled upon, but the padre delivered written instructions to each of the men who were present, so that they might know their duties, and might be at their respective posts when they should be called upon. The time, he said, would very soon arrive, and all were exhorted to use their best exertions to have all things in readiness to strike when the word should be given.

"What is to be done with the prisoners who have already been taken?" inquired a Mexican.

"I am not quite decided on that matter," replied the padre. "With one of them I have a private account to settle, and I claim the control of him. If he will join us, I will spare him, as long as I can make him useful; if not, he must die, for his life is already forfeited to our laws. The Yankee officer I have separated from the rest, and he is in a safe place. He might be of service to us, but I hardly think that I shall offer him any terms, for the Sun demands a victim, and the priests must sacrifice before we begin our enterprise. The other man must be searched for. Señorita Dolores Colatzin released him from the vault last night, and took him away. I do not know what has become of him, and I have not seen the girl."

"Caramba!" exclaimed a young Mexican. "That must be the fellow who was with her at Miguel Avales' fandango last night. She said that he was her cousin from El Paso, and that he was dumb, but I suspected him as soon as I saw him. I insulted the dog of a Yankee, and wanted to give him a few inches of my knife, but she slipped out with him, and I could not see where they ran to."

"It seems that we can safely leave it to you to seek him, and take care of him, Manuel," said the padre.

"I will find the coward, and will make mincemeat of him. I will teach Dolores that she shall have no Yankee lovers."

" You must not harm the girl. I will speak to her, and will endeavor to learn where she has hid the fellow. Come, *amigos*, let us drink a few glasses of wine to the success of our enterprise. You, Manuel, and Christobal, and Señor Gutierrez, must remain here with me to-night."

" You perceive," said Señora Colatzin, as she replaced the brick in the wall. " They are meditating the slaughter of the Americans."

" It is true. This is very important, to myself as well as to my friends. I am sorry to leave you, Anna, but I must ask you to let me out of the house."

" Not yet. It is impossible. My brother and his friends will occupy the other room to-night, and you could not go through without awaking them. You must wait until I can see the way clear for your escape, and in the mean time you must return to the vault, so that you will not be missed."

Although Ward was anxious to be gone, the persuasions of his recovered wife induced him to acquiesce in this arrangement, and he descended into the vault, not forgetting to take his rifle. The opening in the floor was covered with the trap-door, upon which the matting was carefully arranged.

CHAPTER VII.

OLD REGULATION IN DURANCE VILE.

IT was not a very gay or pretentious cavalcade that formed the escort of Major Buttress, as he descended the Taos valley toward Santa Fe, to " report in person," according to the directions of General Kearny.

His strict sense of military honor, or duty, had caused him to construe the order to mean that he should leave his battalion as it was, and should proceed with no guard, being entitled to retain only his personal servants. This did not trouble him, however; for, although he was obliged to take an escort as far as the Rio Grande, he felt entirely safe after reaching that river, as the route was reported to be entirely clear of Indians.

and as the inhabitants of New Mexico were believed to be peaceable and well-inclined. His journey, therefore, partook of the nature of a pleasure-trip, and he lengthened it out somewhat, in accordance with the old army construction of the words "as soon as possible." Captain Sardis, who was on furlough, and who had started with the expedition as a volunteer, accompanied the major on his return, having temporary liberty to dispose of his time as he saw fit.

The party consisted, therefore, of Major Buttress, his daughter and two servants—each of whom had a led horse—and Captain Sardis and his servant.

On a pleasant afternoon they were riding down the valley, not far from the bank of the river, nearly a hundred miles above Santa Fe. The major and Captain Sardis were in the advance, while Fanny loitered near the servants, or galloped over the plain at her own will. She was watched, however, by the careful eyes of her father and her would-be husband, although they were closely engaged in conversation.

"It can't be denied, captain," said Major Buttress, "that we have done very well thus far, and that we have had a pleasant journey. I am really glad that we were ordered back. Frontier posts are any thing but comfortable positions."

"I am well pleased, also," replied the captain, "for it was very disagreeable to travel over those mountains and plains. Your daughter appears to suffer no fatigue from the journey."

"She is the child of an old soldier, you know, and is a good campaigner herself. I am afraid, however, that she is not in good health, for she has not seemed as lively and spirited as usual, since we started to return."

"Perhaps she misses young Bent."

"Do you think it possible? If she does, she will have to get over it, for it is not likely that she will see him again very soon. I flatter myself that I got rid of the boy very neatly."

"You did, sir; but will you not meet him again at Santa Fe? He is only nominally under arrest, I suppose, and I must confess that I do not see how you can substantiate any charges against him."

"I don't expect to. I shall prefer charges, as a matter of

form, to keep him out of the way for a while, and then I will withdraw them. When he is released, I will try to have him sent into active service with the army down in Mexico. The fact is, Sardis, that I can't help feeling a liking for the young fellow, and want to assist him, although I had rather not keep him near my person. He is too much tinctured with the impudence and conceit of young America, but that will be rubbed out in time, and I really like his spirit."

"Is that your reason for wishing to send him where he can get killed?"

"What is a soldier's life worth, unless he has a chance to lose it? When I was at his age, I would have been thankful to any one who would have sent me where I could distinguish myself and earn my promotion. Never fear, Sardis, for I will keep him out of your way, and treat him fairly to boot. But it seems to me, my dear fellow, that you trouble yourself too much about Bent, and that you don't rely sufficiently upon yourself. You ought to show more enterprise and determination. You ought to 'make up' to the girl, as we used to say when I was a bachelor."

"I am proceeding cautiously. I don't want to risk all by a rash venture."

"Your cautiousness will make you a loser yet, I am afraid. You can't expect her to fall into your arms, by simply waiting for her. Have you not approached her upon the subject?"

"I have tried to, but she keeps me at a distance, and avoids it whenever I touch upon it."

"That will never do. You ought to be plain-spoken, and you should learn something definite. I will call her here, and will speak to her before you, so that the matter may be understood between us."

The old officer called and beckoned to Fanny, who soon came galloping up, and reined in her horse by his side.

"We have been talking about you, Fanny," said the major, hardly knowing how to open the subject. "That is, I have been speaking to Captain Sardis. In fact, my child, you know how much the captain loves you."

"Indeed, sir, I know very little about it," replied Fanny.

"What's the reason you don't? You must be blind and

dumb. The captain makes you an offer of his heart and his hand."

"Through you, sir?"

"Through his own lips, of course, if you would let him. Confound it! Sardis, why don't you speak? He says that you keep him at a distance, and when he wishes to bring up the subject, you avoid it."

"What particular subject have I avoided, sir?"

"The subject of the offer of his heart and hand."

"I was not aware that he had tried to offer them."

"But he has. Did I not tell you so just now?"

"If Captain Sardis should make me such an offer," replied Fanny, slightly frowning, "I should consider it too great an honor for me, and should be compelled to decline it."

"What do you mean, girl? Do you know that Captain Sardis is an officer and a gentleman? That he is a man of wealth and family? Have you not understood that I have given my consent? I wish you to listen to the captain and to treat him well."

"I will try to do so, sir; but I hope that he will not ask me to love him."

"What is the matter? He is young yet, and is good looking enough. Have you already found a lover?"

"Perhaps Miss Fanny is thinking of Lieutenant Bent," suggested Sardis.

Fanny's only reply to this insinuation was a tell-tale blush.

"If she is, she had better leave off thinking of him," said Major Buttress. "I have sent him out of her sight, and will take care that she doesn't see him again."

"I know what you have done," replied Fanny, "and I think you had no right to put that young gentleman under arrest for no fault."

"Highty-tighty! Here is a clear case of insubordination. I now perceive that I acted prudently in dealing with the fellow as I did. I wish you to understand, Fanny, that I have made my choice, and you must be suited with it, and that settles the question. You may go now."

"Your suspicions were correct, captain," said Major Buttress, as Fanny cantered away. "She has taken a fancy

to Bent, and I must interpose my authority. Still, I can't help thinking that if you had made proper use of your advantages, and had laid aside your confounded caution, there would have been a different state of affairs."

"She will forget him after a while, and I can wait."

"It will never do for a soldier to wait for an enemy to surrender. He should attack or lay siege."

"Speaking of enemies, major, what do you take that force to be which is approaching from below?"

The party had just passed a large grove at the right, and had commenced the descent of a slope, down which the road wound into a valley. Up the slope was approaching a body of twenty or thirty Mexicans and Indians, armed and mounted, and a smaller party was stealing along the river-bank, at the left, as if to cut them off.

"What can they be?" inquired the major, in some perplexity. "They appear to be armed and in hostile array, but is it possible that we have enemies in New Mexico? I thought that this province had submitted quietly to our arms."

"It may have been a Mexican submission. These people are not noted for good faith."

"If they are enemies, we must retreat, for we are unable to resist them."

"That would hardly be possible, sir, as some of them are well mounted, and it would not do to expose Miss Fanny to the chance of being shot. Besides, our retreat is nearly cut off."

"They have halted, Sardis, and are sending a flag of truce to us. This is strange, indeed. Suppose you ride forward, and learn what it means. We will remain here until you return."

The captain put a white handkerchief on the point of his sword, and rode slowly down the slope, meeting a long-robed priest and a man in Mexican uniform, who advanced toward him from the other party. He addressed these persons, and asked them who they were, why they had halted there, and what was the object of their white flag.

"The flag was shown because we wished to offer you terms of surrender," replied the priest.

"Surrender! To whom, and for what purpose?"

"To the Army of Liberation of New Mexico, because you are Americans and enemies."

"This is the first time that I have heard of such an army. It is a high-sounding title for a parcel of ragamuffin militia."

"I advise you not to insult us. We are marching under the flag of Mexico, and we mean to expel the Americans from our country."

"This is news to me. Do you know who we are?"

"We knew that you are Yankee officers, and our spies have told us of your name, your rank and your destination. But we are wasting time. Are you willing to surrender?"

"I suppose we shall be obliged to; but I must ride back and consult my commander. I have no doubt that he will do as you request."

"Hasten, then. Your retreat is cut off. We might easily have captured you without ceremony, but we wished to avoid the shedding of blood."

"Those fellows demand your surrender, and you will have to comply," said the captain, on his return to his friends.

"Who are they, and what do they mean?" asked Major Buttress.

"They call themselves the Army of Liberation of New Mexico, sworn to drive out the Americans."

"The scoundrels! More likely they are brigands."

"Whatever they are, it is useless to try to resist them. You will have to yield, as you could not fly with Miss Fanny and your baggage. But I can escape and carry the information to our friends, and I will take advantage of the opportunity."

Without another word the captain put spurs to his horse and galloped off.

"That is a pretty way to leave us," said Major Buttress to Fanny, who had come to his side at the first intimation of danger. "Sardis means to save his own skin, whatever becomes of us. We can do nothing but submit, my girl, as these fellows have surrounded us."

The Mexicans had perceived the movement of Captain Sardis, and started in pursuit of him; but he had got into the cover of the grove, and they were unable to overtake him. His servant was shot in attempting to follow him, and one of Major Buttress' servants was also slain.

The major ordered his other follower to make no resistance, and surrendered his sword to the leader of the Mexicans, protesting against his capture as an outrage for which his government would exact ample satisfaction. He and Fanny were treated with a good degree of politeness, although their captors were indignant at the bad faith exhibited by Captain Sardis in making his escape. The priest, with a guard of ten of the best armed men, led them toward the west, while the main body of the Mexicans continued in a northerly direction along the river road.

Major Buttress, as the priest could speak English with some facility, endeavored to engage him in conversation, and to learn what had occasioned the outbreak, who were the leaders of the insurrection, what had been done thus far, and what they expected to accomplish ; but the priest only furnished him with very scanty and unsatisfactory bits of information, and his answers were equally evasive and uncertain concerning the treatment which the prisoners might expect to receive. Finding his efforts useless, the major relapsed into silence, or only conversed in a low tone with Fanny, who bore her captivity with great composure.

They were thus taken, by winding roads, a distance of about ten miles through the country, and it was near sunset when they reached a thick grove, where they were halted and directed to dismount.

They obeyed, and were led along a narrow path through the grove, which was rendered quite dark by the almost impenetrable foliage, until they suddenly found themselves, to their great surprise, within an old stone building, without knowing how they had entered it. The major was taken into a sort of cell, his daughter was shown into another room, and they were left to themselves for a while.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN INHUMAN HUMAN.

LIEUTENANT BENT was very disagreeably surprised at discovering that he had been again locked up by the wily Padre Abrojo.

"This is what I call a successful swindle, and a very mean one," he said, as he tried the door, and found it impossible to open it. "Confound that rascally priest! I wish I was with him alone again, for just three minutes; I would choke him into honesty, or would choke him out of the world. Bill Ward was right, as he always is. These sneaking Mexicans mean us harm. They have made us prisoners by lying to us, and now it is impossible to guess what they will do with us. We will be lucky indeed if we escape with our lives. I verily believe that they mean to rise against our army, and that we are to be among the first victims of the insurrection. They have separated us for some vile purposes of their own, and I hope they are satisfied. Luke Royston was enticed away by a pretty girl, and I was carried off by that scoundrel of a priest, and here I am, completely trapped and shut up within stone walls. If I had my liberty now, with Bill Ward by my side, and good horses under us, and our rifles in our hands, we would make some of these lying Mexicans suffer for their treachery. But it is useless to fret about it, and I had better make up my mind to the worst."

The young officer examined his dungeon, by the aid of the lamp that had been left with him, and found it to be a small oblong room, about twelve feet by eight, with a high ceiling. The walls and roof were of heavy stone, that had probably stood for centuries, and that effectually quenched all hopes of escape. The door was of wood, but was very thick and stout, and he knew that it was secured by a bolt on the outside, as well as by a strong lock.

Escape being out of the question, he looked around to see what arrangements had been made for his comfort, and he

pereceived some blankets on the floor, a rude table, a stool, and a large lamp filled with oil. He concluded that the room had been used as a prison before, or that it was the intention of his captors to keep him there for an indefinite length of time.

As there was nothing else to be done, the young man waited, and tried to be patient. His solitude was unbroken until the close of the afternoon, when the door was opened and a peon walked in, bringing a large tray of eatables, followed by two Indian warriors, armed with spears and short swords, who guarded the door while he placed the tray on the table. Bent endeavored to induce these men to talk, but they either could not or would not speak Spanish, and they went away in silence, locking and bolting the door.

"They don't intend that I shall starve," said the young man looking at the well-filled tray of provisions. "Neither do I mean to starve, for there's no telling what may happen."

After eating he passed the time, as well as he could, in sleeping and meditating.

In the morning his breakfast was brought to him, as the other meal had been. At the same time the peon removed the other tray, and replenished his large lamp.

He had hardly finished eating, when the door again opened, and Padre Abrojo entered, who closed and locked it behind him. The young man rose, and regarded his visitor with a look of anger and contempt.

"This is a pretty trick that you have served me," said he. "Under pretense of showing me something interesting, you have changed me from one prison to another, and have placed me in a dark and solitary dungeon."

"Is not this something interesting, my son?" replied the priest, with a sardonic smile. "Whatever concerns your liberty and safety must be interesting to you."

"This is no time or place for jesting. Why have you separated me from my companions?"

"Because your fate is to be a more glorious one than theirs. You are reserved for a higher and nobler purpose."

"What do you mean? There is a mystery here, which I wish to understand. You inveigled myself and my friends into your power by pretending friendship. If we had not

believed you to be friendly, we would have resisted you, or would have fled from you. You promised us rest and refreshment and a good time."

" You have had plenty of rest and refreshment, and you would have a good time, if you would only be contented. Contentment is all that is required."

" Cease your badinage, you pagan priest—you who wear the garment of a Christian in the service of the Sun. I wish to know what you mean, why I am kept here in prison, and why you say that I am reserved for a more glorious fate than my companions?"

" I will explain it all to you, my son, so that you shall understand it fully. You are aware that your people, under a pretext of a war with the Republic of Mexico, have taken forcible possession of this province, have declared us all to be American citizens, have compelled many of our principal men to take the oath of allegiance to the United States, and have appointed rulers over us, without consulting us, and contrary to our desires. We submitted to these outrages, because we were compelled to, reserving to ourselves the right to overthrow this sham government as soon as we should be able to do so. We think the time has now come to assert our rights and regain our liberties, and we have perfected an organization for that purpose. We are working silently and secretly to that end, and the hour will soon arrive when we shall strike such a crushing blow as will entirely destroy the strangers. I tell you this plainly, as there is no fear that you will escape from here and give information of our plans."

" Do you intend, then, to put me to death?"

" It would not be necessary. But you are too impatient. Allow me to continue my explanation. It was part of our plan to gain possession of as many Americans as we could quietly capture, so that they might not swell the ranks of our enemies, and that we might use them as we should see fit. You and your friends were thus taken by stratagem, such as is allowable in a struggle for liberty. Is this clear to you?"

" Proceed. I see that you mean to massacre us."

" You are aware that a large portion of our people, particularly those of Indian descent, although they have adopted

some of the forms and usages of the Catholic church, are worshipers of the Sun, that they still cling to the ancient Aztec religion. That religion demands sacrifices—human sacrifices."

The young officer shuddered, and turned pale.

"Especially before commencing such an enterprise as that which we are about to undertake," continued Padre Abrojo, "a sacrifice is necessary, and the victim must be no ordinary person, but one who is worthy, by birth and position, as well as in form and feature, of the great occasion. You have been selected from among your companions for this great honor, and you may make your own preparations for death. I can not now tell you the exact time at which the sacrifice will be offered, but you will be informed soon enough to complete your preparations. I hope that my explanation is satisfactory."

"I understand you well enough; but I am surprised that you, who, if not a Catholic priest in reality, are at least a man of intelligence and education, should sanction and uphold such inhuman, barbarous and pagan practices."

"You are mistaken, my son. I do not believe in them. On the contrary, I regard them as remnants of a very silly superstition; but the people are infatuated with them, and they must be pleased, or our enterprise can never be successful."

"It is to you, I suppose, that I am indebted for the honor of being selected as the victim."

"Partly, my son."

"What hinders me, you rascally priest, you abominable idolator, whose iniquity is the greater because you have not the excuse of ignorance, you sneaking assassin and cold-blooded butcher—what hinders me from taking you by the throat and choking out your life, thus putting an end to your villainous ambition and your plans of murder?"

"It is well that you were prudent enough to ask, before making the attempt," replied the priest, drawing a cocked pistol from under his robe. "This would serve to hinder you, as you see; but it would not be necessary, as there are two stout warriors standing at the door, who would quickly overpower you. I will now leave you, advising you to

compose yourself, and to prepare to meet the fate which surely awaits you. You will have good provisions, and must eat heartily, for it is requisite that you look well and in good condition."

So saying, the padre went out, and closed and locked the door, leaving Bent biting his lips with impotent rage.

When he was freed from the presence of his unwelcome visitor, the young man sat down, buried his face in his hands, and thus remained for some time, absorbed in his meditations.

It was bad enough to be a prisoner, and to be in expectation of death; but the fate that was before him was such as he had never thought of, and he could not contemplate it without horror and shuddering. He had never feared death, and he did not fear it now, but it was the manner of the death that he regarded with invincible repugnance. To perish honorably on the field of battle, amid the cheers of his friends and the excitement of the conflict, was one thing; to be slaughtered in cold blood, in a secret chamber of a subterranean temple, surrounded by half-civilized pagans, and awaiting, bound and helpless, the descent of the sacrificial knife, was quite another thing. To be offered up as a sacrifice by idolators, for the purpose of insuring them success in their schemes against his own country, was a fate to which the young officer was quite unwilling to submit, and which must be avoided if possible. But what was to be done?

Certain that he could not avoid it by sitting still, he sprang to his feet, took the lamp in his hand, and again proceeded to carefully examine the walls, floor, and ceiling of his cell.

In one corner was a cylindrical pillar, about three feet in diameter, formed of several stones set upon each other. This pillar, apparently, had formed part of the original edifice within which the cell was constructed, and it had been built into the wall, so as to form a part of it. There had been some carved work at the top, but it had crumbled and fallen down, leaving a small opening, through which struggled a portion of the dim light of the outer apartment. Perceiving a ray of hope in these rays of light, Bent mounted on his table, and tried to move the upper stone, hoping that it might be loose; but he found it firm and solid, and was obliged to abandon the attempt, after bruising his fingers severely.

As he was thus engaged, he heard a rumbling sound as of distant thunder, and noticed a vibration of the walls and floor of the room, which affected him like the discharge of an electrical battery. This was followed, in a few seconds, by another rumbling and another vibration, which shook the table so that he could hardly stand upon it.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed, looking about in wonder. "Are these the premonitory symptoms of an earthquake?"

He was answered by another shock, which was much more severe and of longer continuance than either of the previous ones. It upset the table, and threw him with violence on the stone floor. Another and another shock ensued, but he was unable to rise from where he had fallen, or to take any note of what was going on about him.

When he came to his senses, he lighted his lamp, which had probably been extinguished by the concussion of the air, and again examined the room. The floor was covered with dust and bits of cement that had been shaken out of the crevices, and he noticed that the pillar in the corner had been slightly moved from its perpendicular, and that the opening at the top had been made larger.

On again attempting to move it, he still found that it could not be stirred, but he soon perceived, as he leaned against it, that one of the lower stones was yielding to the pressure of his body. Overjoyed at this discovery, he applied his hands to the stone, and had the pleasure of seeing that it easily moved, as if upon a pivot. Changing the pressure, he drew it inward, until he had nearly removed it from its place, leaving an opening through which he could pass his body without difficulty.

It was not easy for him to repress a shout of triumph when he saw that he had secured a means of egress from the little dungeon which had seemed destined to be his last abode on earth. He tarried long enough to compose his faculties, and to remove the dust which had thickly collected upon him, and then went out through the opening, closing it behind him by carefully drawing back the stone

CHAPTER IX.

DISCOVERIES.

WHEN the young officer emerged from his cell, he found himself in a sort of corridor which ran around the great hall into which he had first been introduced by Padre Abrojo. He did not know what direction to take to look for the passage by which he had entered the temple with his conductor, but reasoned that he might find it by proceeding around the corridor until he should come to an opening.

He commenced the circuit, therefore, keeping as much as possible in the shadow of the columns and within the recesses of which the corridor was formed, lest he might be observed by some of the priests or attendants, who, as he supposed, inhabited the building.

He had gone about half way around the corridor, when he perceived a narrow vaulted passage that led off to the right. As he stopped to examine it, he heard the sound of the voices of women, that appeared to come from the extremity of the passage, and he concluded, after a little reflection, that he would explore it.

Accordingly, he walked softly down the passage, a distance of about twenty paces, until his further progress was barred by a stout wooden door, in which was a grated wicket. As the sounds increased, and as they evidently proceeded from the other side of the door, he applied his eye to the wicket, and saw, in a room about twenty feet square, a number of Indian women and girls, among whom were two Mexicans. They were huddled together, as if they had collected on the occasion of the shock of the earthquake, and were chattering in the Indian, or native Mexican tongue, a language of which Bent did not understand a word.

He plainly saw the face of one of the Mexican girls, and recognized her as the dark-eyed Dolores, who had taken Luke Royston from his prison in the pueblo.

"There is that handsome traitress," he thought. "It is plain

enough, now, that my suppositions were correct, that she had a part to play in the scheme of the wily priest, and that her pretty face was used as a lure to draw poor Royston from his friends. I wonder what further trouble she has led him into. Perhaps he is, even now, as I have been, a prisoner in this old Aztec temple."

There was another person in the group, by whom Bent's curiosity was strongly attracted. She seemed to be neither a Mexican nor an Indian, for she was attired differently from the others, stood aloof from them, and had nothing to say. It seemed to the young man, also, although he was unable to account for the impression, that there was something about this person that was familiar to him—either her dress, her figure, her air, or all combined. He could not resolve his thought into any thing definite, as she remained silent and stationary, and as her face was turned from him.

At last Dolores approached the seeming stranger and spoke to her, when she turned partly around toward the door, and Bent saw—yes, there was no mistake about it—he plainly saw the well-known features of Fanny Buttress!

The blood rushed instantly from his heart to his face, and a feverish flush spread over his body when he recognized her; but it was succeeded by a chill and a sense of faintness, as he reflected on the strangeness of her presence in that place.

How had she got there, and what was she doing there? These were questions which the young man vainly puzzled his brain to solve, until he remembered that his own position would be as unaccountable to her, and then he reasoned more calmly. It was certain that she was not there of her own accord, but as a prisoner, and it was probable that she had been captured in pursuance of the plan that had been detailed to him by Padre Abrojo. If so, what was to become of her? Was she to perish in the general massacre that was contemplated, or was she reserved for some such horrible fate as that to which he was doomed?

The thought of these possibilities was so terrible to Bent, that it produced a sense of deathly faintness, and he leaned against the stone wall for support. When he again looked through the wicket, Fanny was leaving the room in the company of Dolores, followed by the other women and girls. He

was tempted to call to her—to pronounce her name—but restrained himself, as it would lead to his own discovery, and could benefit neither of them.

He quickly came to one conclusion—that he would not attempt to escape from the temple until his situation should become desperate, and even then that he would endeavor to remain in the vicinity as long as there was any possibility of aiding Fanny. Acting on this resolution, he immediately retraced his steps to his cell, lest his jailors might discover his absence and search for him.

He reached it in time, for he had only been there a few minutes when the peon, accompanied by the two warriors, brought in his dinner as usual. He ate heartily, though not with the object recommended by Padre Abrojo, and took the precaution to secrete some such articles of food as he thought would keep, as they might be needed when the time came for making his escape.

A short time after he had finished his dinner, he again removed the stone, and started on another exploring expedition.

He again went down the narrow passage which he had discovered, and looked through the wicket, but the room in which he had seen Fanny was empty, and the door was fastened. He went back to the corridor, and walked around it, looking in at all the recesses, until he came to an opening which seemed able to afford a passage to the outer air, for light came through it, although it was much obstructed by fallen stones and rubbish. Working diligently, he succeeded in removing the most troublesome of the obstructions, and climbed up a rough and narrow ascending passage, until he found himself outside of the building.

Pausing to survey the position, he saw before him, at half musket-shot distance from where he stood, a small mound, around which there were but few large trees, and only a scanty growth of dwarf shrubs. On the crest of the mound was a low stone building, circular in form, and nearly in ruins.

Impelled by curiosity, he crossed the intervening space, ascended the mound, and entered the ruined building through a small opening in the side. It was about fifteen feet in diameter,

and had once been, apparently, of the same height, but the walls had crumbled away so much, and it was so filled with rubbish, that it was hardly breast high in some places. As Lieutenant Bent looked at the mass of ruins and the ground about it, he regarded it with a military eye, estimating and admiring its capacity for defense.

"If I had Bill Ward and Royston with me," said he, "together with three or four men of my company, and plenty of arms and ammunition, we could hold out here against a brigade of these Mexicans."

He sighed as he reflected that he was alone and unaided, and went back to the passage from which he had come, for the descending sun warned him that it was time to be seeking his prison-quarters.

He passed a restless night, dreaming horrible dreams of himself and Fanny Buttress, with whom he imagined that he was about to be sacrificed by the priests and worshipers of the Sun. In the morning, after breakfast, he set out on another journey of discovery, but was obliged to defer it, as the great hall was occupied by the adorers of the God of Day and of the sacred fire. In fact, he narrowly escaped detection as he was returning to his dungeon.

His dinner was brought to him as usual, and was abundant and of excellent quality. Shortly after he had finished it, the turning of a key in the lock announced another visitor, and Padre Abrojo entered the room.

"What do you want now?" asked the young man, rising, and expressing in his countenance the disgust that he felt for the intruder. "Have you come to tell me to prepare for your horrible sacrifice, or to inform me of the hour at which I will be offered up?"

"I have brought you no such good news as that," smilingly replied the padre. "On the contrary, my son, I have come to announce to you that you will probably be deprived of the distinguished honor which I promised you at our last interview."

"What do you mean now? Is this another of your stratagems, as you call your infamous lies?"

"You ought not to be so severe, my son. Some of your expressions are really quite insulting. I have simply told you

the truth, that you are not to be offered up as a sacrifice by the worshipers of the Sun, but are reserved for another destiny, which may be more agreeable to you, though less glorious. Your life is to be spared—upon a condition."

"What is the condition? This is another of your rascally tricks, I suppose; but I may as well inquire your meaning."

"You are aware that we are about to strike a blow for our liberty—that we intend to expel the usurpers of our soil."

"You have told me so."

"In order to accomplish our purpose, and to hold what we gain, we must have an army. We have men enough, but they are not properly organized and drilled, and we have few intelligent officers."

"I know what you mean to say, and I assure you that it will be useless to make any such proposition to me."

"Do not be too hasty, my son. Men have been ruined by deciding too quickly. Are you acquainted with the science of military engineering?"

"I studied it at West Point."

"You can be very useful, then, to the Army of Liberation. If you will join us your life will be spared, and you will have an honorable and lucrative position. If you refuse—"

"Then you will murder me, of course. You may understand me as refusing, distinctly and finally. Nothing can ever induce me to betray my country."

"You are entirely too hasty, and must think better of it. I will give you until to-morrow morning to reflect. Then, if you do not decide to join us, you must die. The same proposition has been made to your friend the hunter, and he has accepted it."

"I do not believe it. Ward would never be so base. For my part, I need no time for reflection, as I have already decided."

"You are too young to die, and life is always preferable to an ignominious death. I am sorry that you have been deprived of the opportunity of dying gloriously, but the priests of the Sun have found a more suitable victim for the sacrifice—a beautiful maiden of your nation."

"Fanny Buttress," instinctively exclaimed Rent, with great excitement.

"That, I believe, is her barbarous name," replied the padre, who was greatly surprised at the knowledge exhibited by the young man. "Do you know her?"

"I do, and I know that she is within these walls."

"Really, my son, there is something wonderful in this. Are you a sorcerer?"

"I dreamed a dream, in which I saw that lady, in one of the rooms of this accursed building, together with a number of Indian women and girls, who were collected together as if they had been affrighted by the shock of an earthquake."

"The vision was as true as if you had seen the reality. You are a wonderful dreamer, my son. I advise you to dream that you have accepted the proposition which I have made to you."

"I will reflect upon it, and I thank you for giving me time. On consideration, I am inclined to think that I will accept it. I will be prepared to answer in the morning."

"I bid you farewell, and hope, for your own sake, that you may dream something to the purpose this time."

Padre Abrojo then departed, leaving the young man to meditate upon the new aspect of affairs which had been disclosed to him.

CHAPTER X.

A HUMBUG.

LIEUTENANT BENT was not a man to sit down quietly, and ponder the astounding intelligence which he had just received. He was by no means elated at learning that he was not to be sacrificed upon the altar of the Sun, for he had been told that another victim was accepted and in readiness—one whose life was dearer to him than his own. The knowledge that Fanny Buttress was that victim had stupefied him at first, and almost paralyzed his faculties; but, when the reaction came, he found his nerves strengthened to meet the emergency, and his mind and body induced with greater energy and capacity for action.

It was plain that he must make his escape before the next morning, for he had no idea of accepting the proposition that Padre Abrojo had made to him. It was also certain that he did not mean to leave the temple and its vicinity without endeavoring to rescue Fanny Buttress, who now, more than ever, needed his assistance.

If he could only discover where she was confined, and could gain access to her, a way might be opened to effect her escape.

It was necessary to make another exploration of the building, and he left his prison for that purpose, and again set out to traverse the corridor and passages.

His search, this time, was as general and thorough as he could make it; but it resulted only in disappointment. He made no new discoveries, and found every thing quiet, as if the old ruin was deserted.

Discouraged and dejected, he returned to his cell, for he was not yet ready to be missed by his jailers, and made his slender preparations for flight. He had resolved to conceal himself near the passage by which he had made his exit from the building, so that he might have an easy means of ingress and egress, and might continue his search for Fanny. If it should come to the worst, he thought that he would at least be able to learn when she was to be sacrificed, and was determined to rush in among her executioners, and rescue her or perish with her.

He had hardly completed his preparations, which consisted mainly in taking care of the provisions that he had saved when he was visited by the peon and the two warriors.

He was surprised to see that they had not brought his usual evening meal, but his surprise was nothing to the astonishment which they exhibited at beholding him. At first they seemed to be almost stupefied, regarding him with open-eyed looks of wonder, and even feeling his hands and his clothes, as if to be certain that it was really him.

Unable to account for their strange actions, Bent asked them what was the matter, and their surprise at last found vent in words.

"Is this yourself, señor?" said one of the warriors, speaking good Spanish. "Are you really alive, and not a spirit?"

"It is no one but myself, and I am glad that you have found your tongues," replied the young man, in equally good Spanish. "What is it that seems wonderful to you?"

"We came here a short time ago, and you were not in the room. We know that you were not here, for we searched in every corner, and even shook out the blankets. We are wondering where you have been, and how you got out."

When the young officer heard this statement, he was afraid that his secret might be discovered, and was at a loss to reply to the warrior. In a few moments, however, his self-possession returned to him, and it seemed possible to turn the astonishment of his jailors to profit. He rose, looked at them with a pitying smile, and spoke to them in a confident tone.

"It is true, my children," he said, "that I was not here a little while ago, and that you now see me before you. I am alive, and you shall judge whether I am a spirit or a mere mortal man. I have often left this room since I was placed here, and I would not be in it now, unless by my own will. You think that it is strong; that no person can escape from it; but I can go through stone walls, and can command all the doors to open to me. You doubt it, but it is easy for me to convince you that I have spoken the truth."

He then mentioned several details of the construction and location of different parts of the building, which he had observed in the course of his explorations. The peón fell upon his face before him, and the wonder of the others visibly increased.

"If you want more proof you shall have it," he continued, perceiving that the warriors were still incredulous. "Leave the room, lock the door, return in a few moments, and I will not be here. Again leave the room, return as before, and you will again see me seated on this stool."

After a brief hesitation, the Indians obeyed his directions, locking and bolting the door behind them.

As soon as they had gone, the young man slipped out through the opening in the pillar, and replaced the stone, leaving a small crevice, through which he could watch the interior of the cell.

The Indians returned, and he saw their looks of wonder and heard their exclamations of astonishment, when they

discovered that he was indeed absent. They rummaged about the room, lifting up and shaking the blankets, and closely examining the walls, floor and ceiling, by the aid of the lamp and by the touch of their hands. Then they shook their heads, consulted together in an undertone, and again went out and locked the door.

Bent immediately slipped back into the cell, replaced the stone, and seated himself on the stool.

When the Indians again entered, their astonishment was redoubled at seeing their prisoner seated before them, smiling serenely.

"This seems wonderful to you, my children," said he, rising and stretching forth his hand. "You shall praise the King of Day, that you, of all men, have been permitted to see and hear it. When you first returned, you saw that I was not here, and yet I was here. I was absent in body, but present in spirit. I know that you spoke to each other of your astonishment, that you looked all around the room to find me, and that you even examined the stones with your spears and with your fingers, to see if there was any way by which I could have escaped. Is this not true?"

"It is true, oh, mighty master!" replied the principal warrior. "We have seen and felt your power, and now we implore you to tell us who and what you are, for we know that you are not an ordinary mortal as we are."

"I am Izatlin, son of the great Montezuma!" said the young officer, in a solemn and commanding tone. "The time has come when I am to reveal myself, and happy are you who have first seen me!"

The Indians fell upon their faces on the floor before him, in silent adoration.

"Arise, my children!" said Bent. "You need not fear me, for I am your friend, although I can be terrible when I am aroused. Do you remember how I shook this temple yesterday? I was angry, because you had put too much pepper in the broth that you brought me."

"Pardon us, mighty prince!" implored the Indians, again prostrating themselves before him.

"Arise, my children, and have no fear! I have descended from the sky for your good, having been sent by my father

Montezuma, whose time for appearing to you has not yet come. I suffered myself to be placed in this dungeon, but these walls would not have held me a moment, unless it had been my will to remain."

"Why had not Padre Abrojo told us of this?" inquired the principal warrior.

"I had not revealed myself to him, because the time had not come, and because he was not a pure priest," replied Bent, unable to resist the opportunity of having a fling at the wily padre. "If you follow his counsels, and submit to his leadership, loss and ruin will issue. The hour has not yet arrived when you are to be freed from the yoke of the stranger. Until that hour you should wait and watch at sunrise for the coming of my father, Montezuma. When you are delivered, and are made a great nation, it will be by the help of the Americans, whom you wish to destroy. If you rise against them now, the attempt will fail and many of you will be killed."

"What shall we do, great prince?" inquired the Indians.

"You must do nothing yet, except what I have already told you. You must wait and watch for Montezuma, as you are in the habit of doing."

"Shall we not go and tell the priests that you have appeared?"

"You must tell no one that you have seen me, for the time has not yet come when I am to show myself to the children of the Sun. To-morrow morning, when you look toward the east for the coming of Montezuma, I will appear in the sunrise, and all of you who are watching shall see me. There is another matter, my children, about which I wish to speak to you."

"Let us hear, mighty master, and we will obey."

"You have an American maiden here, confined in this building, whom your priests propose to offer as a sacrifice upon the altar of the Sun."

"It is true, great prince. The son of Montezuma knows all things."

"Lead me to her."

"Are we not to have the sacrifice?"

"I will offer her up upon the altar myself. I will take her

to the sky, where the sacrifice will be complete. Lead me to her."

The Indians obeyed him without further hesitation, and he followed them out of the room, closing the door behind him, and walking with as stately and majestic an air as he could assume.

He was led through the corridor, by the same route which he had already traversed, down the narrow passage, and into the room in which he had seen Fanny Buttress with Dolores and the Indian women.

"Leave that door open!" he commanded, as the warriors were about to lock the door which opened into the passage.

They obeyed, and showed him through another passage, which was terminated at a door. They unlocked the door, and submissively awaited his further orders.

He directed them to give him a sword and a spear, and the weapons were at once handed to him.

"Leave me now," said he, "and go to your rest. You must not tell any person that you have seen me, and must watch for me in the morning, when I will appear in the sunrise."

The Indians bowed very low and retired, keeping their faces toward the supposed immortal as long as they could see him. When they were out of sight Bent opened the door and entered the room.

It was a small apartment, about the same size as that in which he had been imprisoned, but had a slight air of comfort about it, as if it had been prepared by the hands of women for the use of one of their own sex, for it contained a stool, a lounge, and a neat table, and the stone floor was covered with thick grass matting.

Seated on the lounge, her face buried in her hands, and her disheveled hair floating in loose masses over her shoulders, the young man saw Fanny Buttress, and he at once perceived that she had been weeping.

She started up in affright as he entered, but instantly her expression changed, she uttered a glad cry, and rushed forward to grasp the hand that he extended to her.

"Lieutenant Bent!" she exclaimed, "is this really you, or is it one sent from heaven? I did not expect to meet one of my friends in this world again. Where did you come from?"

How did you get here? But I need not ask, for you have such a sword and spear as my jailers carry. Is it possible that you are one of them?"

"Entirely impossible, Miss Fanny. You need have no fear, for I have come to save you."

"To save me! Can this be true, or am I dreaming again? I dreamed that I was about to die a most miserable death—to be slain in cold blood upon a pagan altar—to be shamefully sacrificed by idolators."

"I know it. I have heard the horrible story, and I have been nearly crazed with fear that I would be unable to save you from such a fate. It is through the providence of God that I am here now. Come with me, for I can at least take you from this place."

"How has this happened? I can hardly trust my senses. How is it that you are here?"

"It is a long story, and I can not tell you now; neither can I ask how it is that you happen to be in such a predicament. I have practiced an imposition upon my Indian jailers, and I fear that it will soon be discovered, and then they will seek for me to imprison me again."

"My father is here. I was captured with him. We must not leave him to perish."

"Where is he? How can I reach him?"

"I do not know."

"Neither do I, and I can not search for him now, or take any risks, for there is no time to be lost, if you are to be saved. You must trust entirely to me, and I will do my best to serve you. I must first see that you are in a place of safety, and then I will endeavor to release your father."

Fanny was ready, for she had no preparations to make. She took a last look at her prison-room, and gladly followed the young man, who led her out into the corridor, moving as silently as possible. No person was to be seen about the building, and they safely reached the passage to the outer air which he had discovered, crept through it, and were soon ensconced within the walls of the ruined building, or the mound.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO GIRLS.

THE dark-eyed Dolores did not forget the young soldier whom she had released from his prison, and whom she had left in voluntary confinement at the small house near Miguel Avales' fonda. On the contrary, she thought of him continually in her waking hours, and he was mingled with all her dreams. She had released him for a freak, rather than with any definite purpose, because she had been attracted by him and wished to see more of him. She had seen more of him, and the attraction had increased rapidly, until, when he told her that he loved her, she was willing to admit that his affection was returned, and only wished to be certain that he was not deceiving her.

She did not know what was the object of Padre Abrojo in detaining the Americans as prisoners, but she felt sure that some harm was intended them, and therefore she had resolved to hide Luke Royston until it would be safe for him to venture abroad.

She had no doubt that he would keep his word with regard to remaining secreted where she had left him until her return ; yet she was very anxious to see him. In spite of her anxiety, she was unable to return to him before the next night, for she had many duties to perform, and was annoyed by the persecuting attentions of Manuel, the Mexican who had taken offense at Luke at the dance-house, who dogged her steps until she was compelled to grant him a lengthened interview. She heard, also, that Padre Abrojo was looking for her, and that fact induced her to conceal herself for a while.

As soon as she was able, she hastened to the house where she had left Luke Royston. She found him comfortably situated, but very lonesome and tired of his seclusion. She explained her absence, and comforted him as well as she could, but he would not be satisfied until she confessed that she loved him, after which he was quite contented.

"What is to happen next, Dolores?" asked the young soldier. "How long am I to remain cooped up in this place?"

"I can not tell, Señor Luco," she replied. "I am sure that the people who put you in prison meant to keep you there, if they had no worse intention, and I have thought it best that you should remain concealed until the danger is over."

"I would not go without you, dear Dolores; but I am not afraid of these people."

"Brave as you may be, you could not do much against so many, and I am afraid that they would kill you. They mean, I think, to rise and drive out the Americans."

"If that is the case, I ought to escape and carry the intelligence to Santa Fe."

"And leave me, Señor Luco? If there was any thing certain about it, you could not reach Santa Fe in time to do any good. You must remain here for the present, and we must wait and hope for the best."

"I will do any thing you tell me to, if you do not wish me to betray my country. But I am anxious about my friends, especially about Lieutenant Bent. They, also, must be in danger, and I want to help them."

"The young officer was taken away this morning. The other American is still in the prison, I know. You could do nothing to help them."

"If you could release me so easily, why could you not release them also?"

"Padre Abrojo is angry, and I can not get the keys. Besides, I do not know where the young officer is. I will try to aid them, for your sake, and will do all that I can."

Dolores then informed her lover that he must not expect to see her frequently the next day, if at all, as she had duties that would oblige her to go a short distance from the village, and she might not return until late in the evening.

"What am I to do in the mean time?" asked Luke. "I shall be so lonesome, that I may attempt something desperate."

"You must amuse yourself by keeping quiet, and you must try to pass the time in eating and sleeping. Does the old woman take good care of you?"

"I have no fault to find with her, except that she has nothing to say. I hope she is as secret as she is silent."

"She is, and she can speak no English. She was my nurse, and she loves me very much. Still, if she could understand you, I would caution you not to tell her any thing. While she knows nothing, she can repeat nothing."

Dolores remained at the small house, occupied with such matters as busy the minds of lovers, until late at night, when she returned to her own dwelling, leaving Luke Royston to pleasant thoughts and ecstatic dreams.

The next morning, she mounted a steady-going mule, and rode forth from the pueblo, taking the same route that had been traversed by Padre Abrojo and Lieutenant Bent, on their way to the buried temple. In fact, she stopped at the same thick grove, passed through the same narrow and winding avenue, and went into the temple by the same entrance.

She walked around the corridor, looked at the sacrificial altar with a shudder, and entered, as if she was a privileged and accustomed character, a door at the side, leading into a room in which several women and girls were seated, employed in sewing and braiding.

After a general salutation to the group, she took a seat near the eldest, and commenced an animated conversation, in which several of the others occasionally joined.

They had conversed but a few minutes, when they were startled by a rumbling noise, and by a shock which caused the stones beneath and about them to tremble violently.

"An earthquake!" they shouted, and all rushed out of the room, and hastily threaded the passages, until they reached a larger apartment, in which another and more severe shock compelled them to stop and huddle together, like an affrighted flock of sheep.

"The prisoner!" exclaimed the eldest of the women. "I must look to her safety, for our sacrifice would be lost if she should be killed."

She left the group, and soon returned with a young and fair American woman, who appeared calm and composed in the midst of the danger and excitement. All waited in terror for another shock, but they were agreeably disappointed, for the commotion of the earth subsided.

Dolores, attracted by the beautiful young American, who seemed lost among so many strangers, went to her and spoke

to her in her broken English, in such pleasant tones and with such sympathizing words, that the heart of Fanny Buttress (for she was the young American) at once warmed to her. When the group separated, Dolores obtained permission to accompany the captive to her cell, and to remain with her a while.

When they were alone, and the door was locked upon them, she asked her new friend who she was, and how she came to be there.

"I am the daughter of an American officer," replied Fanny. "We were captured by a number of Mexicans, but I do not know why we were made prisoners, or for what purpose we are kept here. I think we might have escaped, but there was a cowardly captain with us, who was so careful to save himself, that he ran away and left us as soon as we were in danger. If it had been Lieutenant Bent, I know that he would not have deserted us."

"Who is it that you speak of, señorita?"

"Of Lieutenant Bent, a brave and handsome young officer of our army, who loves me dearly, I think."

"And you love him, señorita, or you would not speak so highly of him. Perhaps he is not far from you now."

"What do you mean? He has gone to Santa Fe."

"Three Americans have been captured and brought to the pueblo, of whom one is a young officer, and I know that his name is Bent, because I asked him if he was a son of the new governor."

"Where is he?" eagerly asked Fanny.

"I do not know. He was confined in the pueblo, but he has been taken to some other place, and I can learn nothing about him."

"You increase my sadness. I fear that he is a prisoner, like myself, in trouble and unable to aid me. He may be doomed, as I am, to some uncertain and terrible fate, for I do not know what is to become of me here. I have been told, in a very mysterious manner, that I am destined to a glorious death, but I know nothing about it, except that I am to die."

"Oh, my dear señorita!" exclaimed Dolores, "I have a horrible thought. I am afraid to speak it, but I must. When the Indian woman went to bring you out from here, she

said that their sacrifice would be lost if you should be killed."

"What was meant by that? I don't comprehend you."

"My mother and I are Christians, but most of our Indian people are pagans, and they still offer sacrifices."

"Human sacrifices?"

"Yes, señorita. It is a horrible thing, and they do so but seldom, and then secretly, as they are afraid."

"This, then, is the glorious death to which they have destined me!" wildly exclaimed Fanny. "Oh, my God! can this be possible? Can such practices exist so near a land of civilization? The very thought appals me, and it will kill me before they are ready to sacrifice me. What can I do, my dear girl? I implore you, as a Christian, to advise me. Is there no way to escape this terrible fate?"

"I know not what to do, señorita, and I am so troubled that I scarcely know what to think. Yet, I will do what a woman can do, and will not desert you while there is any hope. I will go to Señor Luco, and will ask his advice. He is brave enough, but it seems impossible to accomplish any thing."

"Who is Señor Luco?"

"A gallant and handsome American soldier, who was captured with your young officer."

"What have you to do with him? How is it that he is not in prison?"

"I got possession of the key, and took him out to a fandango. When I learned that he was in danger, I would not take him back, but have kept him hid."

"You love him, and he can not help loving you. He will do whatever you ask him. What is his name?"

"It is a hard name, and I have not tried to pronounce it. I call him Señor Luco."

"Is it not Luke Royston?"

"Yes, señorita; that is it."

"He is one of Lieutenant Bent's best friends, and would do any thing to serve him or me. I should be sorry to bring him into danger, but he is free, and perhaps he might help me. Speak to him, my dear girl. Tell him that his friend is in danger, and that I am doomed to a fearful death. I know that he will endeavor to aid us."

"I will hasten to him, señorita. I need only to tell him that you are here, and he will be anxious to fly to your assistance at once. But I must first look about this place and ask some questions. Perhaps providence may aid me, and I may discover some means of helping you."

Fanny warmly embraced her new friend, and Dolores, calling the guard, was let out of the cell. The door was locked after her, and Fanny was left alone, to pray, and prepare for the fate that seemed inevitable.

CHAPTER XII.

A KNOCK-DOWN ARGUMENT.

DOLORES was thoroughly in earnest in the promise that she made to Fanny. She had conceived a strong affection for the young American, and sympathized deeply with the fair prisoner, over whom such a horrible fate was impending. She was resolved to do all she could to assist her friend, although she had not the least idea how her good will could be made available.

She first devoted herself to an investigation of matters within the temple, her object being to endeavor to get possession of the key of Fanny's cell, or to discover some other means of effecting her release. She soon learned that the key was carefully kept during the day by the eldest woman, who might be called the matron, and that it was delivered by her at night to the priests, who lodged in some inaccessible subterranean apartments.

She next sought to elicit the sympathies of the matron, hoping to work upon her feelings so far as to induce her to betray her trust and connive at the release of the captive. This effort also, was unsuccessful, for the woman was so shocked at the thought of losing such a splendid subject for a sacrifice, that she flew into a passion, ordered Dolores to leave the temple, and threatened her with punishment if she should set her foot in it again.

Neither had Dolores been able to learn whether the time had been fixed for the slaughter of her friend, and she was quite discouraged at the failure of all her efforts. She knew Padre Abrojo was all-powerful, and that her intercession with him had been effectual on more than one occasion ; but she also knew that he was angry with her, and she dared not apply to him, or even venture into his presence. She would have confided in her mother, and would have asked her aid if she had not believed that Señora Colatzin was entirely under the influence of the padre, and would be ruled by him.

As she was unable to effect any thing herself, she could only go and consult with Luke Royston, and she hastened to do so. She had been detained so long at the temple that it was after nightfall when she reached the small house, and she was gladly welcomed by Luke, who had been waiting for her very impatiently.

She at once put a stop to his endearments, reproaches and protestations of affection, by telling him of the business on which she had come, of the perilous position of Fanny Butress, and of the message which she had sent, to implore his assistance.

Royston was greatly astonished and troubled by this intelligence, both on account of Fanny, and for the sake of his friend, Lieutenant Bent.

"Something must be done, Dolores," said he, "but I hope I may be shot if I am able to suggest any thing. It is very unfortunate that we should all have been captured, so nearly at the same time, and should have been separated so that we are unable to assist each other. If the lieutenant knew that Miss Fanny was in such danger and trouble, he would break through stone walls to help her, or would butt out his brains against them. But he, poor fellow, is buried in some solitary dungeon, or has been murdered before this time. For my part, I am afraid I have not brains enough to form a plan, or to carry it out if it was formed. If I had Bill Ward with me, I think something could be effected, for the old man has an excellent head for stratagems of all kinds, and he would do any thing in the world for Charley Bent ; but he is shut up close enough, and you told me, Dolores, that you could not release him as you released me."

"It is true, *amigo*. Padre Abrojo is angry with me, and has taken care of the keys so that I can not get them. I am afraid to meet him, because he has been looking for me for some time, and wants to make me tell him where you are hid."

"If he would come here alone, he could find me very easily, and I would be glad to see him. As I am the only one who is free, I ought to do something to help the others, and I wish I knew what to do. Can't you contrive some way, Dolores, to get Bill Ward out of that prison?"

"I can try ; the padre is absent to-night, I believe, and perhaps, I can do something."

"Hasten, then, dear Dolores, but be careful to keep yourself out of danger."

Dolores went immediately to her own dwelling, and found, as she had expected, that Padre Abrojo was absent. But she also learned that he had the key of the room in which Ward was confined, and she was unable even to gain access to the underground portion of the house.

In her perplexity, she went to her mother for consolation, if not to seek advice, and was received with unusual eagerness and affection.

"My dear child!" exclaimed Señora Colatzin, "why have you been so long absent from me? I have been very anxious to see you, for I have great news to tell you. I have seen your father; he is here."

"My father!" wonderingly replied Dolores; "I can not comprehend you, for I hardly knew that I had a father. Where is he?"

Señora Colatzin then related to her daughter the particulars of her interview with her husband, disclosing the causes which led to their separation, and the manner in which he had presented himself to her. Dolores, on her part, was equally communicative and confidential, telling her mother how she had released Luke Royston from his prison, how she had kept him concealed from his enemies, how much she loved him, and how her love was returned. When she had finished this account, with many tears and blushes, she went on to speak of the beautiful American girl whom she had seen at the buried temple, who was doomed to be slaughtered as a pagan

sacrifice, and whom she was so anxious to save from her horrible fate.

"As my father is still in the room below," said she, "and as Señor Luco only needs him to form a plan to help the young lady, why will you not bring him up here, and let me take him to his friend?"

Señora Colatzin assented to this suggestion, and was about to remove the matting from the trap-door, when the voice of Padre Abrojo was heard in the outer apartment, and the next moment he entered his sister's room, and angrily demanded that Dolores should tell him what she had done with Luke Royston.

The poor girl was so agitated and affrighted by this sudden and savage demonstration, that she at first was unable to reply; but she soon mustered courage to defy him, and to declare that the young soldier was in a secure hiding-place, which no power could compel her to disclose.

"I will see about that, you rebellious young vixen," exclaimed the padre; "I will lock you up, and you shall have nothing but bread and water until you obey me and tell me where that fellow is to be found."

Compelling Dolores to follow him, he led her to the large building on the plaza, where he placed her in an up-stairs room and locked the door on her, assuring her that she should not get out until she consented to reveal her secret.

She was too indignant and troubled to sleep much that night, but raged and fretted and wished that she could get out. Her own imprisonment was a small matter, but she was shut up from her lover, from her newly-found father, and from the fair friend whom she had promised to assist. She now felt a personal interest in all the Americans, and longed to be free in order to be of service to them.

The next day she busied herself with thoughts of escape, and when Padre Abrojo came, to inquire if she was ready to give up her secret, he found her firm and unyielding. She soon discovered that the wooden grating of her window was loose and somewhat decayed, and she worked at it diligently and patiently, with her scissors for her only implement, until she removed a sufficient portion to allow her to squeeze through. She then made a rope of the covering of her couch,

and waited for night. As soon as it was dark she let herself down out of the window, at considerable risk, and hastened to the small house to meet Luke Royston.

She had hardly greeted him, when there was a knocking and beating at the door. She told Luke to retire into his room until she could see what was the matter. As she was about to open the door, it was burst open, and Manuel, her Mexican admirer and persecutor, rudely entered the house.

"I have found you at last," said he, "though you have eluded me very carefully. I know all about your intrigue with that cursed Yankee, whom may the saints destroy! and I have come to seek him. He is doomed to death and I promise you that he shall not live long after I set my eyes on him. Where is he? Deliver up the dog to my vengeance!"

"You need not seek him here," replied Dolores. "Go and look for him; I am sure that he is not afraid to meet you alone."

"He is a coward or he would not hide. I am convinced that this is the place to look for him. Where is he?"

"I will not tell you."

"Tell me, or I will choke the secret out of you."

"You dare not attempt such a thing. I warn you not to touch me, you cowardly brute!"

"Tell me, or I will force it from you!" exclaimed Manuel advancing and seizing her by the throat.

Luke Royston, who had guessed the meaning of the boisterous Mexican, although the conversation was in Spanish, stepped out into the room, quietly knocked down the intruder, kicked him out of doors, and watched him until he sneaked away muttering threats of vengeance.

"You must stay here no longer, Señor Luco," said Dolores when they were again alone. "In fact, you have not a minute to lose, for Manuel will soon return with his friends. I have formed a plan by which we may be able to effect something. I will take you to the temple in which the Americans are confined; there are plenty of hiding-places in the vicinity where you can remain concealed as long as you wish. Then, if you are willing to disguise yourself as a woman—and I am sure that you are handsome enough to pass for a pretty girl—perhaps I can take you into her cell."

"An excellent idea, Dolores! But I ought to have some arms; a pistol and a dagger are nothing."

Dolores opened a closet, in which were two rifles, with their equipments and ammunition. Royston eagerly seized one, and Dolores took the other, saying that she might possibly be able to fight, if it should be necessary.

They left the house, and hastened out of the pueblo, to the grove in which the buried temple was situated. On the way, Dolores briefly related to her lover her adventures since she last left him, and explained the relation in which she stood to his friend, Bill Ward.

When they had entered the grove, Royston looked about him, and declared that he could see no such thing as a temple.

"It is near you, but you can not look through the earth," replied Dolores. "Do you see that mound yonder, with a pile of stones on top of it?"

"It looks like a ruined building. Is that your temple?"

"No; but it is the place in which I propose to conceal you for the present. Tread softly, and let us hasten to it."

"Wait, Dolores! It is already occupied. I will swear that I saw a man's head rise above the stones."

"Hush! There is the dress of a woman, and I see her face in the moonlight. It is the young American señorita!"

"Stay here, Dolores, and I will go forward and reconnoiter," said Royston, cocking his rifle.

"I will go too," said Dolores, "for I am not afraid to follow you."

Thus they advanced together, and silently ascended the mound.

CHAPTER XIII.

A "BILL" THAT WOULD CIRCULATE.

BILL WARD descended into his dungeon, after his interview with the wife whom he had supposed to be lost to him, with far different feelings from those which had possessed him when he emerged through the trap-door. He had married ~~Lena~~ Colatzin when he was young, handsome and ambitious,

before he had thought of adopting the wild and solitary life of a hunter, and he had loved her ardently. He had been separated from her through the wiles and influence of her brother, by which mutual distrust had been engendered between the young couple, and he had been induced to believe that she repented of her marriage, that she hated him and his people, and that she feared him as much as she disliked him. Anna, also, had been persuaded that her husband had ceased to love her, that he was a heartless brute, and that he had sworn to take her life. Impelled by fear, she fled with her child, and concealed herself from him. In an altercation with her brother, after she had left him, he wounded the Mexican, and believed that he had killed him. He was obliged, therefore, to leave that part of the country, and he betook to the wilderness, cherishing a profound dislike toward all women.

He had recovered his wife at an age when time had tempered the passions of both, and had made them reasonable. He was so rejoiced to find her, and to know that she was his own again, that the intense desire for escape, by which he had lately been animated, was changed to a wish to remain where he was, to enjoy her society and that of his child.

He had also regained possession of his rifle, which had been, a short time ago, the dearest object of his life, and he was quite contented. In fact, he would have been more willing to bar the door of his prison on the inside, than to open it. He slept peacefully that night, and had pleasant dreams.

He could not help, however, feeling troubled about his two friends, Lieutenant Bent and Luke Royston, who had been captured with him, who had been separated from him, and whose fate and whereabouts were unknown to him. He felt that, as it was possible for him to have egress from his prison, he ought to endeavor to do something for them, and he resolved that he would. He felt, also, that his duty to his country required him to make some effort to give information to the American authorities of the contemplated insurrection which had been disclosed to him; but there were so many obstacles in the way of the task, and it would interfere so directly with his wish to render assistance to his friends, that he was inclined to let this duty pass.

In the morning, as soon as he received from his wife a signal which had been agreed upon between them, he ascended through the trap-door, and entered her room, where he remained until nearly noon, before he even mentioned his wish to leave the house and search for his friends. If Lieutenant Bent had then seen him he would have come to the conclusion that Ward had become unreliable and forgetful of friendship.

"I must leave you to-night, Anna," he said, at last, though his tone indicated that his heart did not go with the words.

"Leave me!" exclaimed his wife. "You surely do not know what you are saying, William. There is no reason why you should hasten to get away from this place, and it is best that you should wait until you can learn something definite in regard to the position of affairs in the province. No harm has been done or promised you as yet, and if you should be in danger, you can at any time escape through this room."

"But I ought to go, Anna," irresolutely replied Ward. "The New Mexicans are about to rise against my people, and there will be a general massacre, if measures are not taken to prevent it. This is very important intelligence, and I ought to make haste to carry it to the authorities at Santa Fe."

"Would you ask me to aid you to escape, in order that you might give information of the plans of my people? I do not pray for their success, but I am not willing to betray them. You ought not to expect me to deliver my own blood and kindred to the executioner."

"It does not look fair, I confess; but it is my duty to give the information, and I must get out of this house without your assistance."

"Without my assistance you would be quickly discovered and recaptured. Besides, why should you undertake such risk for no purpose? You are many miles from Santa Fe, and it is not at all probable that you could reach that place, even if you were well mounted, in time to be of any service to the Americans, or to prevent the plans of the Mexicans from being carried out. It is too late, William, for Governor Bent and several other Americans have already been slain at Fernandez, and the revolt has actually begun. It has commenced sooner than was intended by the leaders, I have no doubt, but it has none the less commenced, and you would not

be in time to stop it. Again, you have no horse, and I would defy even your wit to steal one in this neighborhood without detection."

"As it is useless to make that attempt," said Ward, "I must at least try to do something for my friends who were captured with me."

"What can you do? You would only endanger yourself without benefiting them. It is necessary to find out where they are, before you can attempt to release them, and you must depend upon Dolores and me for that information."

"Can I get it from you? Have you yet asked the girl what has become of the young soldier?"

"I have not, because I have not yet seen her. She will soon return, however, and then she will tell me all she knows. In the mean time, I will make such inquiries as I can, and you have nothing to do, at present, but to remain here in quiet, at least unless some pressing danger should drive you away. I have no doubt that I will be able to give you some news to-night."

Bill Ward, who was willing to be persuaded, consented to follow the advice of his wife, and descended into his dungeon in time to get his dinner.

It was not until pretty late at night that he was again informed by signal that he might ascend to the upper regions, and then he found Anna in a state of excitement, for Dolores had just been taken out by Padre Abrojo.

He inquired what was the matter, and his wife told him all the particulars that had been related to her by Dolores, and how the girl had been locked up by her uncle.

"It is plain enough now that I can join one of my friends," said Ward. "Let me out of this house, Anna, and I will instantly go to Royston. Perhaps we can do something for the girl, if we are together."

"It is impossible; Dolores did not say where he is concealed. I hope she will be released to-morrow, and then I will find out. I have learned that your other friend is still alive, and I think I can guess where he is confined. To-morrow I shall be able to speak with certainty. Until then you must wait."

So Bill Ward was persuaded to endure his prison-life for another day.

The next morning he received an unexpected visitor, in the person of Padre Abrojo.

When the priest entered, Ward stood up, took a position near the corner in which he had concealed his rifle under a blanket, and stared defiantly at his visitor.

"Good-morning, my friend," said the padre. "How goes it with you to-day?"

"As well as may be, no thanks to you."

"You ought to be thankful that I give you your life and something to support it, as you are an American and an enemy. I have come to do you another favor, to make you a splendid and generous offer. We are about to rise and throw off the yoke of the Yankees."

"I understand all about that. What do you want?"

"You are better at guesswork than I had supposed. Briefly, then, we want such men as you, and I have come to propose to you to join us. If you will, you shall have life, liberty, and a position; if not, you must die. Your friend, the young officer, has already accepted my proposition."

"I am glad to hear that the boy is alive, but I know you are lyin' when you say that about him. Jest put me down as sayin' no, squar' and plump."

"I expected that you would refuse at first, as he did. I will give you until to-morrow morning to consider. If you do not then accept, you must die."

"Look-a-here, you, whatever you call yourself," said the hunter; "thar's no use in words. I know you, Pedro Colatzin, and you know me. I don't want to hurt you, and I advise you to git out of this place mighty quick."

"I call myself Padre Abrojo," said the priest, with an angry look. "I am a rock, as my name indicates. I tell you that you must accept or die, and I leave you to make your choice."

He left the room, and Ward smiled, as he thought that before morning he might be beyond the reach of his enemies.

It was but a little after dark when the hunter again received the signal from his wife, and this time he took his rifle with him when he went up into her room, as he did not expect to return to his prison.

Auna welcomed him warmly, and was much troubled when

he told her of his interview with Padre Abrojo, and of the proposition that had been made to him. She agreed with him that it was time for him to make his escape, and at once commenced preparations for flight.

She procured one of Padre Abrojo's long robes, which she compelled Ward to put on over his clothes, and covered his head with a broad-brimmed hat. She then filled his pockets with eatables, and he pronounced himself ready for “a tramp, a camp, or a fight.”

Señora Colatzin had not been able to discover where Dolores had been locked up, but she had learned to what place Lieutenant Bent had been taken, and so informed her husband.

“The young officer,” she said, “is confined in an ancient temple, that is buried in the forest a short distance from the village. There is no lack of places for concealment in that vicinity, and you can remain hid there until it is safe to travel.”

“As it is well to be prepared,” said Ward, “I will take Bent's rifle, for I may need it, whether I find him and Royston or not.”

“And I will carry the other,” said his wife. “If two rifles are useful, three must be more so.”

“Do you mean to go with me, wife? I should be sorry to bring you into danger.”

“I am sure I shall not leave you until you reach a place of safety.”

The night was quite dark, except when the moon shone faintly, and all was still in the village, when they set out and walked to the forest in which lay the buried temple. As soon as they reached it, Ward threw off his broad hat and long robe.

“I wish your brother no more harm, Anna,” said he, “but these clothes of his are poison to me.”

They passed through the narrow and winding avenue, until they reached the hill which indicated the site of the temple, and then walked around its base.

“The old temple is buried under that hill,” said Señora Colatzin, as she stopped and looked around. “I know of a portion of the building which will serve you as an excellent hiding-place, if I can remember where it is. Hark! I thought I heard voices. Did you hear them, William?”

"I did, by thunder! and this old hoss is sartin that he knows one of 'em," replied Ward, relapsing into his hunter's idiom. "Come with me, Anna; I reckon we are all right now."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CITADEL.

"WHAT do you think of this place?" asked Bent, as he picked out a smooth stone within the ruined building for Fanny to sit upon.

"If we are safe from pursuit, it is a paradise of a place," replied Fanny. "We can at least breathe the free air of heaven, without the continual dread of being led out to be slaughtered."

"I feel sure that we will be safe during the night, and we must pray to Providence to protect us in the morning. I suppose there will be a hue-and-cry for us then, for the Indians, who will look for my coming in the sunrise, will discover the deception that has been practiced upon them, and will be angry enough."

As Fanny expressed a strong desire to learn what had happened to him while he was a prisoner, as well as the manner in which he had deceived the Indians and gained access to her cell, Bent proceeded to relate his adventures since he had left her in the mountains. When he had finished, he asked her, in turn, to tell her story, and Fanny briefly gave an account of the means by which she had been taken prisoner, and of her subsequent captivity, including her interview with Dolores. It was natural that Bent should express himself strongly with regard to the conduct of Captain Sardis, and Fanny was equally plain in his condemnation.

"I could not help thinking at the time," said she, "that if you were with us, you would not have deserted us as he did."

"I would have defended you with my life," warmly replied Bent, "and I would have been only too glad to share your captivity."

"I know it, and I appreciate all you have done and all you were willing to do. Not only did I think of you at that time, but you have been in my mind ever since. I have dreamed of you, and have looked to you for assistance, although I supposed that you were far away, and that you could know nothing of my trouble."

"I wish I could be in your heart, Miss Fanny, as you are in mine, and that you could know how much I love you."

"I do know it," answered Fanny, with a blush, "and I think of you more than of any one else. Is not that enough?"

"It is, Fanny! It is enough to fill my heart with thankfulness. My captivity and danger have been blessings to me, since they have given me the knowledge of your love."

"But we must not speak of that now, Charley, for we are still in danger, and we have other matters to think of. I wish I knew what has become of that kind Mexican girl."

"I was surprised and glad when you told me that she had shown such sympathy for you, for I had believed that she was one of the creatures of that rascally priest, and that she had led Royston off for some evil purpose. If he is free, you may depend upon it that he will make an effort to rescue you."

"Hush, Charley! I think I hear voices. Some one is surely coming this way."

"Is it possible that they have found me out already? Remain where you are, Fanny, and I will reconnoiter. I wish I had some better weapons than this spear and sword. These are no enemies. I see only a man and a woman," said Bent, as he looked over the wall. "They are coming right here, and I think I know them. Yes; I am sure I do. Look, Fanny!—it is Luke Royston with Dolores!"

In a few moments the new-comers entered the ruined building, and warmly greeted its occupants, who were rejoiced at receiving this unexpected and pleasant addition to their company. Mutual explanations followed, the members of the party told their several stories, and all expressed thankfulness for the good providence by which they had thus far been brought out of their difficulties, and had been so strangely united. Dolores, especially, excited interest, by disclosing her relationship to Bill Ward, and by describing the meeting between her mother and the husband from whom she had been

so long separated. The friends of the old hunter were glad to learn that he was in a position to regain his liberty when he should see fit to do so, and they had no doubt that he would use it to search for them.

Lieutenant Bent was rejoiced to see the rifles that Royston and Dolores had brought, and he immediately appropriated one of them.

"Now that we are armed," said he, "we may think about fortifying and defending our position, for it is a good one, and we could stand a siege if we were provisioned."

In the first place, however, with the aid of Luke Royston, he applied himself to the arrangement of a resting-place for the girls. He had brought a blanket from his own cell and one from Fanny's room, and Luke had the large serape with which Dolores had disguised him. They made a smooth place among the rocks, on which they spread the blankets, and compelled Fanny and Dolores to lie down, though they both protested that they had rather remain with their defenders and assist them in their labor.

Then the young officer proceeded to make a fortification of the ruined old building, clearing out the inside, so as to give room and opportunity for action, building up and strengthening the low and weak parts of the wall, and making embrasures to shoot through. As their fire-arms consisted only of two rifles and a pistol, it was necessary to make the defenses as complete as possible.

While they were engaged in this labor, Royston called the attention of his friend to some figures that were emerging from the forest, and Bent surveyed them through one of his embrasures.

"Another man and woman, as I live!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible that these also are friends? We have no friend left in this neighborhood but Ward, and I should hardly dare to hope that it is him. Yes, Luke, it is himself, or so like him that I will venture to hail."

He did so, and immediately perceived that his voice was recognized, for the two figures began to ascend the slope, and in a few minutes he had the satisfaction of taking his old friend by the hand, and of being made acquainted with his new-found wife. Fanny and Dolores quickly joined the group,

and Bill Ward was embraced by his daughter, whom he had lately declared to be "a dangerous critter," with "wickedness oozin' out of her black eyes."

Bent was again obliged to tell his story, but he heard, in return, that of the old hunter, who declared that he would be perfectly satisfied, now that he had found his friends, if he could have a brush with the Mexicans.

"Speakin' of a brush, my boy," he continued, "you havn't found a good place to fight in."

"We found it a good one, and have made it better," replied Bent. "We only wanted plenty of arms and ammunition, and I am glad to see that you have brought your rifle and ours. We now have five guns to three men, and that is a pretty liberal allowance. If we should not be able to use them all, I have no doubt that the ladies would be willing to help us."

"Thar'll be no necessity fur that, I reckon. We kin manage all the greasers and Injuns that are apt to come in sight. Ef I am good at guessin', they will find work somewhar' else afore long, ef they haven't found it already. You folks had better lie down and git some rest, while this old hoss watches the camp."

"For my part," said Fanny, "I am troubled about my father, and wish we could have him here with us. Would it not be possible, Mr. Bent, in your character of the Aztec prince, to compel the Indians to show you where he is confined?"

"If I could see the Indians, I would make the attempt, although I know that it would be useless, and would only lead to the discovery of my imposition. But they live in some secret, underground apartments, which I have not been able to find in the daytime, and I am sure that it would be useless to search for them at night."

Bent and Royston, therefore, laid down to rest, after seeing that the ladies were comfortably situated, leaving Bill Ward to guard their stronghold, for they knew that they could not have a more faithful sentinel.

The night passed quietly, and early in the morning all were up, and partook of a cold breakfast, which came from the pockets of Bill Ward and Bent. The sun rose, and commenced

to climb the heavens, but they neither heard nor saw any thing of their enemies. The old hunter, dissatisfied with this state of affairs, vowed that he would go and find some Mexicans, if they would not come to him, and started out to reconnoiter ; but he had not gone far when a large body of Mexicans and Indians, led by two large dogs, came out from the forest, and started in pursuit of him. He shot the foremost dog, and ran back to the ruined building, which he reached just in time to escape the jaws of the other, which Royston dispatched with his pistol.

The Mexicans, at the head of whom Padre Abrojo could plainly be seen, doubtless thinking that they had driven their foes into a corner, rushed up the slope to gain possession of the ruin ; but they were met by a volley which laid three of them low, and two others received their fate from the spare rifles. They retreated, surrounded the mound, and made another charge from all quarters, with an incessant fire of bullets and arrows. They again met a deadly fire, and the few who were brave enough to reach the summit fell under the pistols and knives of the besieged.

The assailants again retreated in disorder, and sought the shelter of the forest, from which they continued, for more than an hour, a desultory fire upon the fort, to which its defenders thought it hardly worth while to reply.

"They are waiting for artillery," said Bent, at last. "They are afraid of our rifles, and have sent for a cannon to batter down our defenses."

"I would like to know how they are goin' to git it here," said Ward. "It's my idee that they are kinder scatterin' off, and I do believe that thar's goin' to be a stampede among 'em."

The hunter was right. There was a sudden commotion among the Mexicans and Indians, who ceased firing, and in a few moments they entirely disappeared.

The Americans waited nearly an hour for further demonstrations, and then permitted Royston to go out and reconnoiter, as he still retained his Mexican disguise. He was gone a long time, as it seemed to his friends, but he returned in great haste, bringing the intelligence that the insurrectionists had submitted to a body of United States troops, who were then in possession of the village.

The three men in the old ruin gave three hearty cheers, in which the women gladly joined, for they felt that their liberties were safe at last, as well as their lives.

"Now, Fanny," said Bent, "I will go and search for your father. I will find him, if he is within that horrid old temple, if I have to blow it to pieces. Come, Luke; we will leave Bill Ward in charge of the ladies, as he is the safest hand."

Royston was ready and willing, and the two young men seized their rifles, and hastened down the slope to the buried temple.

CHAPTER XV.

A SORRY PRIEST, BUT A HAPPY RANCHE.

THE insurrection, by which Padre Abrojo had hoped that the power of the Americans in New Mexico would be overthrown, had been prematurely commenced, and it terminated abortively. A massacre occurred at Fernandez, in which Governor Bent, Sheriff Lee, and several other Americans were murdered, and there were other massacres in the valley of Taos; but the New Mexicans were only an undisciplined mob, without proper arms or capable leaders, and they did not attempt to follow up their successes, or to attack any body or post of United States troops.

Padre Abrojo, who was one of the principal organizers of the revolt, was highly indignant at the manner in which it had been commenced, before the preparations had been completed by which its success was to be insured; but the ball had been started, and he could not prevent it from rolling as far as it would.

As soon as intelligence of the massacres and outrages was received at Santa Fe, Colonel Price marched out with his troops, and met and defeated the insurrectionists in several engagements in the valley, in which they lost about three hundred men, and the Americans but fifty or sixty.

The arrest and execution of the leaders ensued, and the padre found that he would have enough to do to save his neck

and look after his immediate concerns, without attempting to fight the victorious Americans.

As the United States forces had not yet reached his pueblo, the padre considered himself able to gratify his desire for revenge without hindrance. In the first place, he wished to gain possession of Luke Royston, in order to make the number complete, and for that purpose went to the room in which he had locked up Dolores, at a very early hour in the morning, intending to compel her to reveal the secret of the young soldier's hiding-place. Greatly to his surprise, he found that the bird had flown, and the loosened gratings and the rope at the window plainly showed how she had made her escape.

Highly indignant at having been foiled by a girl, he hastened to her mother's room, thinking that Dolores might have taken refuge there; but Señora Colatzin was absent, and no one knew what had become of her. He then went to the prison, in the lower part of the house, to wreak vengeance upon Bill Ward. His surprise amounted to astonishment when he unlocked the door and found the cell empty! Convincing that the prisoner could not have made his escape without assistance, he soon came to the conclusion that Señora Colatzin had recognized her husband, had released him, and had gone off with him.

Pale with rage, he mounted his mule, and rode to the buried temple, satisfied that he yet had three victims—Lieutenant Bent and Major Buttress and his daughter. He found the two warrior guards, together with a number of other Indians and the priests and peons of the temple, collected in the large hall, near the sacrificial altar, and gazing earnestly at the beams of the newly-risen sun that poured through the opening at the east. Their countenances exhibited various shades of expectation and disappointment. He approached them, and inquired the cause of the unusual gathering.

"We are waiting and watching for Prince Izatlin," replied one of the warriors.

"Prince Izatlin! Who is he?"

"He is the son of the great Montezuma. We saw him last night, and he promised to appear to us in the sunrise this morning."

Further questioning elicited from the Indians the whole

story of the deception practiced upon them, and Padre Abrojo, rushing to the cells which had been occupied by the young officer and Fanny Buttress, saw that the tale was true—they had, indeed, escaped.

Nearly beside himself with rage, he ordered the Indians to take bloodhounds, and to hasten in pursuit of the fugitives. At the same time he sent to collect the band of Mexicans and Indians who were to be under his leadership during the insurrection.

In a short time the hunt commenced. Search being first made in the vicinity of the temple, it resulted in the discovery of more than he had expected to find. Rejoiced at having cooped up all his prisoners in such a little place, he ordered his men to charge and take them, but he found, after two trials, that he could not induce them to face the deadly rifles of the Americans.

When they had retired to the shelter of the forest, and while the priest was waiting to complete other arrangements for the reduction of the ruin, fugitives from the village brought intelligence that it had been entered by United States troops. Nothing was left to the natives but submission or death. A deputation was sent back to make terms with the conquerors, and in a few minutes the disappointed priest found himself deserted by his entire force.

Taking one of the warrior guards, he hastened back to the temple, and unlocked the door of the secret cell in which Major Buttress was confined. The old officer was seized and bound before he had time to resist, and was dragged, by the frantic priest and his assistant, into the large hall, where he was laid upon the sacrificial altar.

"What does this mean?" the Major indignantly asked, as soon as he could get breath enough to speak. "Do you call this civilized or proper treatment of a prisoner?"

"I mean to kill you!" wildly exclaimed the padre, drawing a knife from his girdle, and flashing it before the eyes of his victim. "You are to be sacrificed upon the altar of the Sun, to make the gods merciful to our friends who are slain."

"Do you mean to slaughter me in cold blood? I see that you do. Answer me one question, I implore you, before I die. What has become of my daughter?"

"She is dead :" he shrieked ; " they are all dead, curse them."

"Then I am ready. Kill me as soon as you please."

The priest had raised his knife to strike the deadly blow, when he was rudely interrupted by Lieutenant Bent and Royston, who had come upon the group unperceived. Royston struck down the Indian warrior, and Bent tore the would-be executioner from his victim. The major's bonds were cut, and he saw who his deliverers were, and thanked them heartily.

Padre Abrojo broke from the grasp of Lieutenant Bent ; but Major Buttress, snatching a pistol from Royston's belt, fired at the man who had sought to murder him. The bullet struck the priest in his forehead, and he fell dead.

Bent then delighted the heart of the old officer, by informing him of the safety of his daughter, and took him to her. When they were all united, they went together to the village, where they found a squadron of dragoons of Major Buttress' command, in charge of Captain Sardis. That officer explained that he had obtained aid, and had sought for them ; but the major treated him quite coolly, and Fanny absolutely refused to notice him. They remained at the pueblo a short time to rest, and then continued their journey to Santa Fe, which place they reached in safety.

A few months after the conclusion of these adventures, Major Buttress was approached by Captain Sardis, who again made overtures to him for the hand of his daughter.

"It is useless to talk about that any more," said the old officer. "Fanny loves Lieutenant Bent, who did not desert her when she was in danger, and I am willing that she should marry the man who saved my life."

The marriage, however, did not take place until Bent received his captaincy, which he soon won by gallantry on the fields of Mexico.

Luke Royston obtained his discharge and married Dolores. As his bride had become quite an heiress by the death of her uncle, the young couple settled down on a rancho, together with her father and mother, locating where Ward could freely indulge his propensity for hunting.

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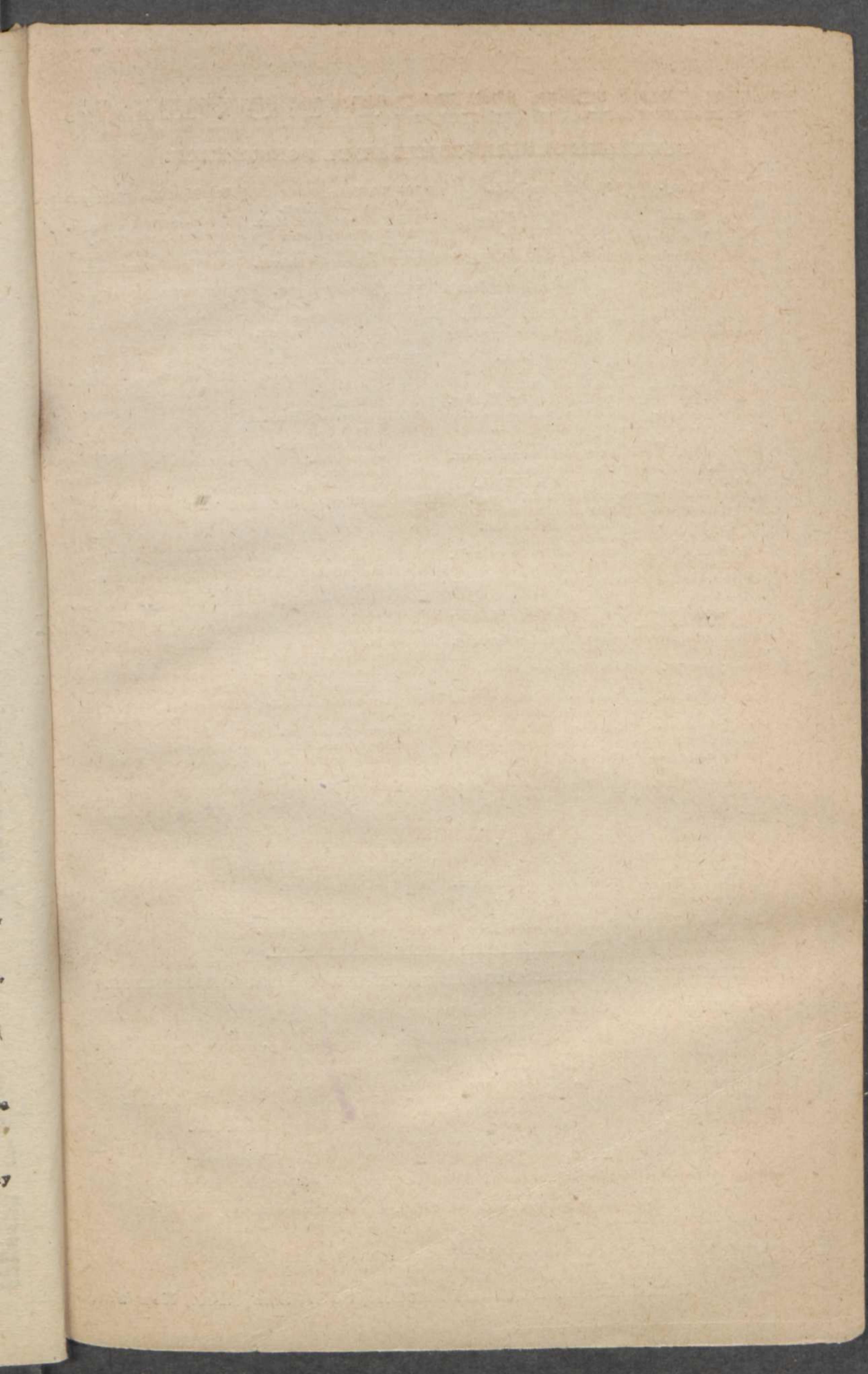
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| 51 Tom Hawk, Trailer. | 104 Scarred Eagle. | 157 The Bandit Hermit. | |
| 52 The Mad Chief. | 105 Nick Doyle. | 158 The Patriot Scouts. | |
| 53 The Black Wolf. | 106 The Indian Spy. | | |

THE FOLLOWING WILL BE ISSUED IN THE ORDER AND ON THE DATES INDICATED

- 209 **The Border Avengers.** By Edward Willett. Ready June 27th.
 210 **Tim Bumble's Charge.** By Mrs. Mary A. Denison. Ready July 11th.
 211 **The Shawnee Scout.** By J. Stanley Henderson. Ready July 25th.
 212 **The Slight Slayer.** By W. J. Hamilton. Ready August 8th.
 213 **The Prairie Queen.** By W. J. Hamilton. Ready August 22d.
 214 **The Backwoodsmen.** By Asa Beall. Ready September 5th.
 215 **The Prisoner of La Vintresse.** By Mrs. Mary A. Denison. Ready September 19th.
 216 **Peleg Smith.** By Boynton H. Belknap, M. D. Ready October 3d.
 217 **The Witch of the Wallowish.** By Edwin E. Ewing. Ready October 17th.
 218 **The Prairie Pirates.** By Gustave Aimard. Ready October 31st.
 219 **The Hussar Captain.** By Colonel Prentiss Ingraham. Ready November 14th.
 220 **The Red Spy.** By P. Hamilton Myers. Ready November 28th.
 221 **Dick Darling.** By Captain Frederick Whittaker. Ready December 12th.
 222 **The Mustang Hunters.** By Captain Frederick Whittaker. Ready December 26th.
 223 **Guilty or Not Guilty.** By Mrs. Ann E. Porter. Ready January 9th.
 224 **The Outlaw Ranger.** By Joseph E. Badger, Jr. Ready January 23d.

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